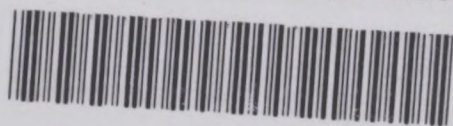




THE HOP PICKERS

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THE HOP PICKERS

THE HOP PICKERS

Girl Life in the Sixties

BY

Mrs. FLAVIA CAMP CANFIELD

Author of "The Big Tent," "The Refugee Family,"
"The Kidnapped Campers"

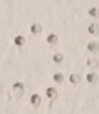
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MORGAN DENNIS



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TO MY FAMILY
AND
FRIENDS OF THE SIXTIES

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THE HOP PICKERS

CHAPTER I

THE HOME MISSIONARY'S FAMILY

“**M**AMA, are we going to have the lamp lighted to-night?” asked Flora.

“I hope so,” replied Mrs. Morton, looking up from her sewing and pressing her hand over her aching eyes. “I have some buttonholes to make in the baby’s apron, and I need a stronger light than candles for that.”

“You’ll hurt your eyes if you try to sew in the dusk any longer,” said the daughter. “Why can’t I light the lamp just this once? I’ll be very careful.”

“No,” returned the mother decidedly. “I’m afraid to have any one but your father touch it. He’ll be back from the post-office before long, and I’ll ask him to light it then.”

Flora said no more and began to pick up a number of toys scattered about the floor.

“That’s right,” said her mother in a tired voice. “This room looks worse than usual to-day. Your father has been writing all the afternoon on his sermon and is so tired he’ll notice the disorder more than usual. You’d better straighten out the tablecloth and hang up the children’s hats. Jessie,” she called to a little girl who was reading by a window, “come and pick up the spools the baby has been playing with and put them in Mother’s basket.”

“Can’t Hattie help me do it?” asked the child, turning down a leaf at the corner to mark the place where she left off.

“Jessie thinks she can’t breathe without her twin,” said Flora, laughing.

“Hattie is setting the table for supper,” replied her mother. “She didn’t ask to have you help her do that.”

“All right,” returned the little girl in a resigned tone, falling on her knees to pick up the spools. “I’d just as soon do it, only Hattie can find them better than I can when they roll under the lounge and book-case. I don’t see how

Benny manages to scatter them so," she went on in a grumbling tone.

"Babies make a great deal of work, dear," said her mother, as she folded up her sewing. "What do you suppose I did when you and Hattie were little?"

The child sat down on the floor with the work-basket on her lap and pushed her curly hair away from her round dark eyes as she exclaimed: "Oh, two of us at a time must have been awful, Mother! I don't see how you got along!"

"Well, you were so sweet and cunning you paid for all the care and work you made, just as Benny does," returned the mother cheerfully, as she picked up the fat ten-month-old baby and began kissing him.

By this time the two pairs of young hands had made the little living-room look neat and orderly. Wraps and books and playthings were put into a closet, bits of paper and thread were picked up from the worn rag carpet, chairs and stools placed where they belonged, and a small

kerosene lamp containing a brownish yellow oil placed on a table with a box of matches by its side.

“Here’s Papa,” said Jessie, as the door opened and a middle-aged man with iron gray hair came into the room with a quick step. He was of medium height, but so slim and straight that he looked tall.

“Why, how dark it is!” he exclaimed. “Why don’t you have a candle?”

“I’d like to use the lamp a little while this evening if you think we can afford it,” said his wife. “I have some fine sewing to do, and the candle light tries my eyes.”

“Why, of course we will afford it,” said her husband, walking briskly to the table. “Has the lamp been filled and cleaned to-day?”

“Yes, it’s all ready for you to light,” returned his wife.

Mr. Morton took off the glass chimney and turned up the wick. He then applied a lighted match to it and put the chimney over the sputtering yellow flame. Hattie had come into the

room now, and the three sisters stood round the table to watch with breathless interest this wonderful lamp-lighting ceremony.

"Stand back farther, girls," cautioned the mother. "It might explode."

"There's no danger, Mary, I think, if you cleaned it well," said the father.

"It's thoroughly cleaned and trimmed," said Mrs. Morton, "but I can never get over the feeling of danger from the stuff—it's so terrible inflammable."

"It's not so dangerous as a camphine lamp, is it, Mama?" asked Flora. "Ada Fay has one of those to go to bed by."

"Oh, I wouldn't have one of them in the house," exclaimed her mother, shuddering. "I don't see how the Fays can take such risks."

"My! How horrid this lamp smells!" cried Hattie, holding her tiny nose between her thumb and forefinger.

"I'd rather have a candle," remarked Jessie. "That's safe, and it doesn't smell."

"But the lamp gives a much stronger light,

you know," argued Flora. "This is just the same as six candles, isn't it, Papa?"

"Yes, it's six or seven candle power. It's a great invention. You know the oil comes right up out of the ground, and there's a great deal of it. It's cheaper and safer than camphine, and after a while they will learn how to purify it so the smell will not be so disagreeable, and it will give a better light. It will be cheaper too, so that everybody can afford to use it."

The little lamp with its feeble light would have seemed a poor affair in these days, but sixty years ago, in the Middle West, petroleum was just coming into use, and in the little Wisconsin village of Minnichute, where the Mortons lived at that time, there were only a few families who had courage and money enough to burn it. It was considered a luxury as well as being a new, untried, dangerous thing and only to be used occasionally.

Mr. Morton was a home missionary, sent by an Eastern society to labor in the West. Half

his salary, of four hundred dollars a year, was given him by the society, and the rest raised by the little struggling church to which he ministered. This sum was usually eked out by boxes of clothing from the Eastern society and donation parties given by the friendly villagers. At the last one, which was supposed to be a surprise party, the lamp had been a gift from all the parishioners, who had "clubbed together." The Mortons would have thought it a luxury they could not afford.

After supper Mrs. Morton put the younger children to bed, the twins washed the dishes, and Flora, after drawing the curtains to shut out the September evening dusk, brought out some paper, pens and ink, as she wished to write a letter. Her father sank into an old easy chair which creaked with his weight and wiped his spectacles before beginning to read a newspaper which lay folded at his elbow. Presently Mrs. Morton came with her fine sewing to complete the cozy group around the little lamp.

“To whom are you writing, dear?” asked the mother, glancing at Flora’s flying pen.

“To Jennie Dill,” replied the young girl, looking up. “I promised to write her once a week, and I’ve neglected her lately.”

“You must have a good deal to say to each other to exchange four long letters a month,” remarked her father, smiling. “But I suppose bosom friends have many important matters to discuss.”

“Jennie’s a nice girl, Papa,” remarked Flora, a little hurt at her father’s tone.

“She should be if she is a worthy daughter of Caleb Dill.”

“Rhoda is like her father—she is quiet and dignified. Jennie is lively and full of fun. I like both the girls, but Jennie suits me the best,” said Flora judicially.

“How old did you say those girls are?” asked Mrs. Morton, biting off her thread.

“Rhoda is twenty and Jennie was fifteen last month. She’s just six weeks younger than I am.”

“Rather young to be teaching school,” remarked Mr. Morton, looking up from his paper.

“She succeeds splendidly, Papa. You ought to see how well she manages those children, and you know there are a rough lot of boys in Atwood. I don’t know what the family would do without the money she earns. Mr. Dill hasn’t been able to do anything for a year, and Rhoda’s embroidery and Jennie’s wages are all they have to live on.”

“I’m afraid you were a tax on them during your long visit last month,” said the father.

“Oh, we lived mostly out of what they had in the garden, and I helped Rhoda a good deal with her embroidery while Jennie was away at school, so I guess they didn’t feel it very much.”

“It’s a pity Mr. Dill had to leave the ministry,” remarked Mrs. Morton. “He was doing so well, and the girls should have gone on with their education.”

“Jennie means to go to school again some time,” said Flora. “She’s very ambitious and

has any amount of pluck. I wish I could have taught this summer," she went on, idly balancing her pen holder on her finger. "I could pass an examination for a certificate as well as Jennie, and I think I need the money as much as she does."

"You weren't well enough, dear, after your bad throat in the spring," said her mother. "We'll manage some way to get clothes for you so that you can go to school comfortably this fall and winter, and next summer when you are sixteen you will be better prepared to teach and will be quite young enough then. You know Nelly is almost seventeen."

"Papa, shall we have a box this year?" asked Flora.

"Perhaps," said her father, going on with his reading.

"If we do have one I hope they will send us something besides old silks and satins and worn-out slippers."

"I shall be thankful for anything in the wearing line," said Mrs. Morton. "The twins are

growing so fast they have outgrown all their clothes. I can make over almost everything that comes."

"I'm tired of made-overs," said Flora, dipping her pen in the ink. "I just long for a chance to earn money to get some brand new clothes all my own."

She scribbled away at her letter after this for a half hour, writing in a rather careless, slovenly hand several pages of "sermon paper" her father had given her, and then decided to go to bed. The twins were there already and sound asleep.

Mr. and Mrs. Morton sat by the lamp a little longer for the chat they usually had after the house was quiet and the children asleep.

"Flora is very restless since her visit to the Dills," said Mrs. Morton. "Jennie's teaching has put the notion in her head that she ought to earn her living now. She does need a new dress and a hat and some shoes. I wish we could afford them for her."

"Oh, she'll have to learn patience," said the

father. "She's only a child yet. I can't bear to have our girls go out into the world so young. I wish we could have kept Nelly at home another year."

"So do I," said the mother with a sigh. "But Flora is so pretty and so bright it would be hard to keep her back, especially as other girls of her age consider themselves young ladies."

"I wish she had a little more perseverance," said Mr. Morton. "There would be greater hope for her future if she had some of Nelly's industry and stick-to-itiveness."

"It wouldn't be fair for one child to have all the gifts, would it?" asked his wife. "Nelly should have something to offset Flora's beauty and talent."

"Yes, there's something in that view of the case," assented Mr. Morton. "They're both good girls and will turn out all right, thanks to their mother's training."

Mrs. Morton smiled as she went on with her sewing and her husband continued: "I think we may be able to get Flora a new dress.

Deacon Jones told me to-day they are talking of giving us a donation this fall."

"Oh, dear!" sighed his wife, dropping her work in her lap. "I dread it. But I suppose it's the only way of getting your salary paid, and we'll have to put up with it. I feel very much like our naughty Jessie, though, when she calls them 'darnation' parties."

"She's about right," said Mr. Morton, laughing. "I don't like to have what I have earned brought to me in the form of a gift. But, as you say, there seems to be no other way of getting my salary this year. Every one feels poor, and it seems easier to pay in potatoes and calico and hams than in money."

Mrs. Morton rose and lighted a candle, for their nine-o'clock bed time had come. Mr. Morton carefully turned down the wick of the lamp until the flame went out in a puff, and as they went to their room with its clutter of big bed, trundle-bed, and cradle, Mrs. Morton remarked, "Well, hams and potatoes are very acceptable, but I do hope they will give us a little money too. We need it so much."

CHAPTER II

A NEW SCHEME

THE next morning when Flora was dawdling about the house rather listlessly, she heard a knock at the front door. When she answered it a plain little man appeared, who asked if he could engage any hop pickers there.

“Hop pickers!” echoed Flora. “I don’t know what you mean, but if you will walk in I will ask my mother. I don’t believe we have such a machine though.”

The man laughed as he seated himself in the sitting-room where Mrs. Morton was, and explained that he was engaging girls to pick hops for men who raised them in large quantities for the market. The demand for pickers was great, as there was an unusually large crop this year, and he had been canvassing towns and villages

and even the cities to engage a sufficient number.

“What do they pay?” asked Flora, greatly interested.

“Well, pickers get paid according to what hops bring in the market. This year they fetch a good price, so pickin’ will pay well. A fair picker can easily earn two dollars a day besides keepin’.”

“Mama! Mama! Just think of that,” said Flora eagerly. “And the work certainly can’t be hard. It’s just the thing for me!”

“Hard! Nothin’ hard about it,” said the man. “Most girls call it play.”

“Where is this hop region?” asked Mrs. Morton.

“It’s up in Sago County, ma’m, about forty miles from here in a straight line. The girls from these parts will have to take rather a roundabout way to get there. They go on the cars to Maddock Junction, then across the country in teams.”

“And are these hop growers nice people?”

“The folks up there are all well-to-do and re-

spectable. Oh, yes, ma'm, you can be sure of that."

"And do they have good food and comfortable beds?"

"Prime, ma'm! Couldn't get better livin' at first-class hotels. I'm engagin' hands for Dick Johnson's folks now, and they take pride in setting the best table in the country for their pickers."

"I have heard," said Mrs. Morton, "that in New York a very rough, low class of people are employed to pick hops. How is it here?"

"Well, ma'm, there's all sorts of people in a hop yard. You can pick your own crowd and let the rest alone. Besides, look here, I've got on my list twenty-five of the nicest girls in this town!"

"Oh, read it, please," said Flora eagerly.

The agent produced his book, when it was found that most of Flora's acquaintances in the village were going, and she exclaimed wonderingly: "I don't understand how Ada Fay and the Becket girls should be on that list. I

thought there was no reason for them to earn money.”

The agent shook his head. “I’ve made a bad bargain there, I reckon,” he said. “I have orders not to take that kind. But they want to go for the sake of the adventure. They teased and hung on so I couldn’t get rid of ’em. Mr. Fay wants his girl to go on account of her health.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Morton, “I have heard that picking hops in the open air is very healthful and is often recommended to invalids. I expect it would be a good thing for you, dear.”

“Oh, I’m not an invalid now,” said Flora. “I would go for the money.”

“That’s right. You’re the kind I want,” said the agent, approvingly, again opening his book. “How many names shall I put down from this house?”

“Four,” said Flora, promptly, looking to her mother for approval.

“I don’t see how I can spare all of you,” said Mrs. Morton, a little hurt that Flora had not

thought of this herself. "I have been counting on you and Nelly to help me with the sewing."

"But just think of the money we can earn!" exclaimed Flora. "And we can do the sewing when we get back."

"But there are Arthur and Katie to take care of, and the baby is so fretful with his teething. I don't see how I can get on alone."

"Well, the twins would better not go," said Flora hastily.

Mrs. Morton looked reproachfully at her daughter. The twins had been kept out of school to take care of the younger children and help their mother so that Flora might go away for a visit, and if any one needed a holiday they did. They were not here to plead for themselves, but Flora knew they would be indignant if they were left at home, and Nelly, whose heart was set on going away to school in the fall, would not be willing to lose the chance to earn all the money she could for that purpose. The family sewing, always behind, had accumu-

lated to such an extent that there was pressing need for more than one industrious needle. Flora knew she ought to stay at home to help her mother and let the rest go.

“Well,” she said, in answer to her mother’s look, “I’ll give it up. I see I ought not to go.” But she could not speak cheerfully, for her quick fancy had conjured up such gay and jolly times with a crowd of fun-loving girls, to say nothing of the chance to earn some money, that she felt as though she could not be left out of the excursion. But she said no more about herself, and began planning for the others, trying hard to hide her disappointment.

Her mother was silent for a moment and then said: “After all, dear, I think I could manage to let you go, if your father is willing. I can’t bear to have you miss it. It would do you so much good, and you would have the chance to earn some money. You will need every penny you can get if you have any new clothes.”

“But how, mother dear?” said Flora, anxiously. “I really don’t see how you can

get on alone with the babies. I was selfish to think of such a thing."

"I managed with you and Nelly when you were little, and I guess I can do as much now," answered her mother, looking up and smiling. "Besides," she went on, "you won't be gone so very long, I imagine."

"A month or six weeks at the outside, ma'm," said the agent, with his note-book open in his hand.

"If that is all, I can easily spare you, dear," said the mother. "And perhaps the wash-woman's little girl will help me occasionally."

It ended by the agent taking the four names, Mr. Morton gladly giving his consent to have so many noisy children out of his hearing for a while. The agent then told them how to prepare for the trip, and was about to go when Flora was struck with an idea. "Mama," she said, "wouldn't it be splendid to have the Dill girls go in our company? I don't suppose Rhoda could leave home, but I think Jen would. Her school closes by that time and she is crazy

to earn money, and mercy knows they need it enough. May I write to some friends to go with me?" she asked, turning to the agent.

"Well, I guess so," said he, looking over his note-book. "I haven't canvassed Atwood yet. I allowed to get pickers there for another man, but probably it won't make any odds." So the matter was left until Flora could write to her friends to see if they would go. She was to let the agent know at once by mail, for the picking was to commence in about ten days, and it was necessary to make sure of the right number as soon as possible.

The letter was at once sent, with a full and glowing account of the enterprise and an urgent entreaty that all of the Dill girls would go if possible, and that Jennie must not fail them. When it was received there was much discussion as to which of the elder sisters should stay at home to keep house for the father and brother. But in the midst of it a neighbor, good-hearted Mrs. Jones came in and said: "What's to hender the hull kit and bilin' of you

from goin'? I'll take care of things for ye. Your pa and Johnny can take their meals to our house. Oh, I'll make ye pay fur it," she went on, as Rhoda opened her mouth to speak. "I shan't do it fur nothin'. Ye needn't be alarmed, and I think ye might give a poor, old woman a chance to make a little money, too."

Rhoda smiled. She had had no vacation from indoor work and care for a long time. The prospect of weeks of out-of-door life seemed blissful. She could hardly believe it had come to her so suddenly and delightfully.

Jennie and Kitty took the matter less calmly. They were wild with excitement and delight, and hugged Mrs. Jones until she was out of breath and then ran off to bring their father into the council. As they expected, after reading Flora's letter, he readily gave his consent to all the arrangements, and seemed especially pleased that Rhoda was to have a vacation.

Preparations for the journey were begun at once in both villages. According to the agent, each "picker" was limited as to baggage to a

small bundle or satchel. No trunks or boxes were to be taken. Gloves, large aprons, heavy shoes, and big sunbonnets were necessary, but they were not expected to carry any "good clothes," "though we are going to smuggle in a little finery in spite of Mr. Agent, for who knows what may happen," wrote Flora, in one of her numerous letters of instruction and advice to the Dill family.

A lady living in Minnichute had once picked hops in New York, and her experience and counsel were worth a good deal to the girls in preparing their outfits. She had an excellent pattern of gloves, with long gauntlets reaching to the elbows. This was circulated among them, and each one made a pair for herself of heavy bed-ticking. Then large-sleeved aprons and "slat" sunbonnets were made, dresses were shortened, and thick shoes and wraps provided.

Nelly Morton closed her country school in time to come home and share the exciting preparations. She was fair and plump like Flora, and the sisters were thought to look alike

though their temperaments were different, Nelly being quiet and persistent.

The twins were in a fever to help, but their nine-year-old fingers were too bungling to be of much service. It was the mother who made them all comfortably ready, sewing many nights until after midnight, while her four rosy daughters slept soundly.

CHAPTER III

THE JOURNEY

AT last the eventful day came for them to start, and twenty-two happy young creatures collected in the little station to wait for the train which was to take them on the first stage of their journey.

Mrs. Morton's tired eyes and pale cheeks, as she lovingly kissed her daughters good-by, haunted Flora, and she felt half-inclined, on her way to the station, to turn round and give up going. But the generous impulse was nipped in the bud when Tilly Mickells came bounding up to her, swinging her sunbonnet by the string, and shouting: "How are you, hop picker?" A foretaste of the coming fun was in the air, and in an instant the twinges of conscience were forgotten, and Flora plunged into the spirit of the adventure. The girls thought it would be

“great fun” to wear their uniform of sunbonnet, apron, and striped gloves, on the journey, so the passengers stared as they trooped into the cars, their smiling faces hidden under their deep sunbonnets, and they might have been taken for some fantastic sisterhood but for their giggling and chattering.

When they arrived at Maddock Junction they found Mr. Johnson himself waiting for them. He was a quiet, bashful man, and looked as though he wanted to run when the girls flocked around him and deafened him with their questions. But he finally marshalled them into line, and they marched to a hotel close by where a bountiful dinner was ready for them, and where they were to stay till the Western train came which was to bring the Dill girls.

The dinner was not fairly over before they heard the roar of the incoming train, and soon the Dill girls, together with many other hop pickers of every age and condition crowded out of the cars and filled the station with commotion. Half a dozen “hop growers” were there



"A month or six weeks at the outside, ma'm," said the agent with his note-book open in his hand.

to receive the companies that had been engaged for them, and there was an immediate flocking around the wagons which stood in a row waiting to carry the newcomers away.

The Dill girls struggled out of the crowd, looking anxiously around in every direction for Flora Morton, who was also on the lookout for them.

“Here, Jennie!” she shrieked, catching sight at last of the square shoulders of her friend, and immediately a green and a blue sunbonnet were diving into each other in a frantic manner, and the two girls were laughing, hugging, and talking all in one breath.

But there was no time to lose. There were twenty-five miles yet to travel, and some of the way was rough. Mr. Johnson ran round frantically among his girls, and if they had been an unruly flock of sheep they could not have caused him more trouble. But at last they were all seated in the big wagons, as tightly squeezed together as sardines in a box. The bundles and satchels were packed under the seats, the

drivers cracked their whips, and away they rolled out of the little village and on to the broad, green prairie. Other wagons started at the same time, and there was much racing and screaming and shouting as one team would pass another.

“I suppose those people are some of the rough ones that Mama is so afraid of,” said Nelly Morton, as a wagon-load of fantastic creatures whirled past them, shouting and waving many-colored sunbonnets. Mr. Johnson slackened his pace “to let them crazy critters go by” and his two wagons were soon left behind and jogging comfortably along, much to the relief of the timid ones who did not relish the racing.

The older girls had taken their seats in the first wagon, which was driven by Mr. Johnson, while the Morton twins and Kitty Dill, who were immediately on most affectionate terms, were stowed together with the rest of the Minnichute “small fry” in the other one, which was driven by a “hired man,” as bashful and silent as his master.

As soon as the confusion of starting was over,

Flora introduced her Atwood friends to the Minnichute girls, whose manners were so friendly and cordial that they felt at home at once, although it was some time before names and faces were thoroughly learned. As they sat on the long, omnibus-like seats in two rows facing each other, Flora began with the first one, May Becket, a fair and delicate blonde. Next to her was Tilly Mickells, whose little pug nose, lively black eyes and freckled face were in striking contrast to the regular features and fair skin of her next neighbor, Lizzie Becket, who was always blushing and smiling. She was May's sister, and they had lived in Minnichute six months. Their father was a physician who had left his home in a large Massachusetts town to begin a new life and regain his health in Minnichute, which was a bustling little village on the edge of a breezy prairie.

Ada Fay sat beside Lizzie Becket. She was pretty except for a settled frown and a discontented expression on her fair face. She had an abundance of reddish-brown hair, a tall figure

and white hands. Her father was the leading merchant of Minnichute. She was an only child, and was generally spoken of as too much petted and spoiled. Her neighbor was Ann Mather, a stolid girl of plain features and matter-of-fact ideas, who could never understand or approve of jokes. Nina Taylor sat next to her, "a cunning little thing," her friends always said. She had lovely blue eyes and good features, but the beauty of her round face was sadly marred by the marks of smallpox. She had her arm around her bosom friend, Minnie Waters, who was called a beauty, and she had a sort of china-doll prettiness, with delicate features, pink and white skin, and silky and abundant flaxen hair. But she was a silly little thing, and nobody expected sensible behavior from her. The others in the wagon were Nora, Fanny, and Myra Jennings, two sisters and a cousin, freckle-faced, lively and good-natured, who talked and laughed incessantly without much minding whether they were heard or not.

The weather was lovely, the air warm but not

sultry, and the sun shining through a slight haze. The broad prairie lay stretched out before them, rich and level, in the beautiful Wisconsin valley through which they were going. Any one would have enjoyed that ride, and a party of young girls without a care and just starting on an adventure were, of course, in the highest spirits. They sang songs till they were hoarse, they joked with each other, letting poor, meek Mr. Johnson alone after trying in vain to include him in the conversation, and they exhausted all their adjectives in praise of the country through which they were passing. Late in the afternoon they crossed the Wisconsin River on an open bridge where the girls had a wide view of the broad and beautiful stream, curling swiftly round its tree-covered islands and showing glimpses here and there of fickle, shifting sandbars. After this came rough or sandy roads where the horses crept slowly along, and often long hills had to be climbed, where the girls were asked to walk part of the way.

And now the gay spirits began to droop, and over the long stretches of sand, tired heads rested on neighboring shoulders and all the songs died out. "How much farther do we have to go, Mr. Johnson?" was the question the poor man had to answer every five minutes.

"We're just about half way now," he said at dusk. "Reckon we'll get there about nine o'clock."

"Wonder if we'll have any supper before then," said Jennie, in a whisper to her neighbor.

"Hope so," said Tilly Mickells in a tone intended for Mr. Johnson to hear. "I'm as hungry as a bear!"

But darkness came on and found them plodding wearily along. The country had become rough and wild. Their road led them through dark woods for many a mile, when the nervous ones shivered and screamed, and all of them felt rather sober when they heard unusual sounds. In one of these dark passages Minnie Waters, declaring that she was going to faint,

fell out of the wagon, the girls not being warned in time to catch her as she leaned suddenly back, and there was great confusion and scrambling as both teams stopped.

“Oh, Minnie, darling, are you killed?” screamed Nina Taylor, while all the little Minnichute girls in the other wagon began to cry. But Rhoda Dill soon restored order by picking up the cause of all the disturbance who was crying heartily from the pain of a bumped head.

“Why didn’t some of you catch me?” she said angrily between her sobs. “I didn’t suppose you would let me fall out that way. It might have killed me.”

The girls saw by this that the faint had been planned for a sensation and burst into a hearty laugh, which made poor Minnie cry louder than ever. Rhoda cuddled and soothed her, and presently silence fell again over the weary party.

Some of the little girls were asleep and some crying under their sunbonnets from hunger and weariness when at last, about ten o’clock, they halted before a brown frame house and Mr.

Johnson broke the stillness by saying cheerfully: "Well, here we be!"

They were all stiff and lame when they climbed out of their seats, and a forlorn procession walked up the neat path to a side door, each girl carrying her bundle. The house looked large and comfortable. The agent had promised that accommodations should be "prime," and visions of little bedrooms with neat beds and carpets and mirrors, with plenty of water and clean towels, and near at hand, a large dining room with a good supper spread in it, passed through the minds of some of the girls who had been to boarding-school.

CHAPTER IV

PRIME ACCOMMODATIONS

AT the door they were met by Mrs. Johnson, who in appearance and manners was the opposite of her hulking, bashful husband. She was short, straight and trim, though her figure was far from thin. Her face and head were square and broad which, with her shoulders of unusual breadth, gave her the appearance of strength and solidity. A keen pair of frosty blue eyes looked at the tired girls who silently trooped past her and were directed through an open door which led them to their rooms. The little woman did not speak a word of welcome, and eyed the lagging steps and drooping figures with apparently little favor.

“Two rooms for twenty-two to sleep in,” said Nelly Morton. “I wonder if that’s what they call good accommodations.”

The two rooms were entirely barren of furniture with the exception of a broken-backed chair which held a solitary candle, burning dimly and casting a feeble light over the rows of straw beds on the floor, crowded so close together as to leave no space except a narrow path in the middle of the room.

A bed in any form was welcome to the tired young travelers, and they were soon stretched at full length upon them, while the older ones aired their indignation.

"I say it's indecent to ask girls to sleep in a room with no curtains at the windows," said Flora.

"We'll have to pin up our shawls," said Jennie, suiting the action to the word and stabbing pins through her old, faded plaid into the window casing.

"The beds are clean, and that's a comfort," said May Becket, dropping on to one and examining the coarse sheets.

"But they are so hard," whined Ada Fay.
"And I never slept on the floor in my life."

“Just imagine you are a soldier,” said Jennie. “A good many of them would be glad of clean, straw beds on a dry floor. Think on your ‘marcies,’ girls.”

“Well, the soldiers had at least something to eat. They aren’t starved as we are,” said Kitty Dill, dolefully.

“That vinegar-pot of a woman treated us like cattle,” said one of the girls.

“Oh, dear,” moaned another, “I wish I hadn’t come!”

“I hope they will at least furnish us soap and towels,” said Rhoda, who now spoke for the first time. “We can go to the pump to wash, at any rate.”

“I don’t believe she will allow even that,” remarked Ada Fay, crossly. “She wouldn’t let her pigs and sheep go there, and she doesn’t consider us any better than so many animals.”

“Well, she feeds her animals, at any rate, so I presume she will open the door and throw in some corn before long. Here pig! pig! pig!” said Jennie in a guttural voice, imitat-

ing a farmer's call to his swine at meal time.

The girls all laughed, but Minnie Waters said: "I don't believe we are going to have anything to eat. I don't smell anything cooking, and the house is as still as the grave. Oh, dear! I shall die! I know I shall," and the babyish creature turned her face to the wall and sobbed aloud, while several of the girls settled into forlorn attitudes and looked for pocket-handkerchiefs.

"Nonsense, girls!" said Jennie. "You have no pluck! Let's not whine, whatever we do. Who's going to die from going without one supper? Let's go to bed and forget all about it. It will soon be breakfast time and, of course, she won't starve us, for then we can't pick her hops."

There seemed no other way to do, so the soiled and weary creatures were preparing for their rude beds when the door was opened by the little woman without the ceremony of knocking. She called out the single word, "Supper!" and then walked off.

“Where’s her corn?” said one of the girls, struggling into her clothes.

“I suppose we must find it,” said Jennie, taking the lead.

They passed through a little sitting room, dimly lighted by a single kerosene lamp placed on a stand near a window, and Jennie opened a door, expecting to pass into a dining room. But, instead, a blank wall of darkness met her as she stepped out onto a little porch.

“Come on, girls!” she called, joyfully. “I smell coffee! Follow your noses, or rather, follow mine.”

“We’d have to go to heaven then, wouldn’t we, Jen?” said her sister Kitty.

Jennie laughed. “Well, if my poor, turn-up nose doesn’t deceive me, it will take you to a heavenly blessing in the form of a good supper,” she said, as she hurried along.

The girls huddled on their clothes and rushed after their leader, who stepped across a clean, grassy yard a short distance from the house toward a long, rough shanty where she rightly

guessed supper was to be found. Rhoda looked round for the pump, which she soon spied near the porch, and by it a rude bench on which she found half a dozen tin wash bowls while three or four large, crash towels hung on rollers against the side of the house. The girls, taking for granted these were intended for their use, were soon enjoying the luxury of soap and water, and quite refreshed, they entered the shanty where a great surprise met them.

They had expected the supper to correspond to the other accommodations, but here, in a long, narrow room, was stretched a table, brightly lighted with half a dozen lamps, covered with the whitest of table-cloths, and loaded with rich and appetizing food. There were platters heaped with cold chicken and turkey, smoking dishes of mealy potatoes near them, while biscuits, pies, cakes, cheese and preserves, with golden lumps of butter, and plates of pickles, filled up every inch of space beside the plates.

Mrs. Johnson came through a door at one end of the dining room, and after directing them to

their places at the long table and telling them to help themselves, left the room with a quick step. The girls needed no second invitation and were soon eating, with a keen relish, the delicious supper.

“It seems like a chapter out of the ‘Arabian Nights,’ ” said Flora. “There we were in that miserable room with one tallow candle, just ready to die from hunger, when, ‘Open sesame!’, and here we are in this bright light and eating this splendid supper.”

“Mrs. Vinegar-Pot is a fairy queen, isn’t she?” said Kitty Dill.

“And here comes the princess!” whispered Jennie.

All eyes were turned toward a beautiful woman who came into the room with a large tray containing cups of the fragrant coffee which Jennie’s nose had discovered. The woman’s dress was a new pink calico, of a pale tint which set off an exquisite pink-and-white complexion. Her features were perfectly regular, her eyes large and black, her shining hair also black,

coiled low on her lovely head, and her large, plump figure was straight and graceful.

The girls immediately felt the mysterious influence of beauty, and stared at her in a manner not at all polite as she passed the coffee to them with an absent and indifferent air, as though she was thinking of something else, and then walked out of the room with a stately tread.

The girls looked at each other in amazement!

“Who can she be?” said Tilly Mickells.

“I never saw such a beautiful creature in my life!” exclaimed Nina Taylor.

“She certainly can’t belong here!” said Minnie Waters.

“She looks like a ‘tragedy queen,’ ” said May Becket, who had been to the theater in the city.

“Let’s give her Jennie’s name and call her the Princess,” said Flora.

The girls all agreed to this, and soon after left the table. But they were very tired and soon forgot the “lovely unknown” in a sound sleep, too much needed to be disturbed by their hard beds and barren surroundings.

CHAPTER V

HOP PICKING

THEY were wakened before light the next morning by the sharp voice of Mrs. Johnson, who put a lighted candle on the chair and called: "Come, girls, get up! Breakfast in ten minutes."

"The idea of making us get up in the night," said the thin voice of Ada Fay, as she pushed back her long, red locks. "Wonder if she expects us to pick her old hops by candle light!"

"Perhaps so," said Jennie, who was hurrying on her clothes. "I shan't be surprised at anything in this queer place. I have an idea we shall have to scramble if we get any breakfast."

The girls yawned and left their beds slowly. "Dear me! How lame I am!" said Minnie Waters.

"So am I," echoed half a dozen voices.

“Where are my shoes!” was a general cry.

“Oh, dear! Isn’t this dreadful! I’m sick of it already,” moaned Ada Fay.

“Hark! What’s that noise?” called some one.

“Another mystery, I suppose,” said Flora.

They all listened to the muffled sound of many trampling feet which seemed to be over their heads, and soon they heard a steady patter on the stairs.

Flora peeped out of the door as the footsteps continued through the sitting room. “A bare-footed band of ragamuffins, as near as I can make out,” she said.

“And if we don’t hurry they will eat up all the breakfast,” called Jennie, rushing out with her comb and brush in her hand.

Half a dozen girls were ready with her, and after washing vigorously at the pump, the cold morning air bringing the blood to their cheeks, and hastily brushing their hair, they were ready and passed to their places in the dining room.

The table was brightly lighted and loaded

with food. At the end nearest the door a crowd of semi-savages of both sexes and all ages, was eating with the utmost speed. They were through and gone long before the straggling Minnichute party finally collected, the soiled plates of the greedy eaters disappearing rapidly by the deft hands of the Princess.

The tardy girls found cups of cold coffee standing by their plates, while the steak and ham, potatoes and griddle cakes were in the same condition.

Their discontented remarks reached the Princess, who was standing at the other end of the table. The girls had not yet heard her speak, and turned curiously at her first words. They expected, of course, that she would have a voice to match her face and figure, but to their astonishment, she called out in a hard, harsh voice: "Folks that lie in bed mustn't expect nothin' in this house. Mighty lucky that you get any breakfast. Mrs. Johnson don't feed lazy bones."

"Oh, dear!" said Flora, in a whisper. "I'm

sorry she spoke. It's just as though a rose had a horrid scent instead of a sweet one."

"Nothing ever turns out as you expect it's going to," said Jessie Morton, soberly.

By this time the gray light of morning had appeared and the lamps were put out, leaving the girls to finish their meal in the dusk, while the Princess stood impatiently by to collect the soiled dishes. "Come, girls, hurry up!" she said at last. "I can't wait all day."

"I wonder what next!" said Jennie, as they all rose and went out to the porch.

"Who would have thought such a beautiful creature would have such a vixenish temper!" said May Becket.

"What shall we do now?" some one asked.

"I don't see a soul to ask," said Flora. "And I'd as soon think of putting my head in a lion's mouth as to go near Vinegar-Pot."

"You go and ask her, Jen!" said several voices.

"Well, I'm not afraid. Who'll go with me? She won't kill us if we ask her a civil question."

Tilly Mickells volunteered, and the two girls passed through the dining room and boldly opened the kitchen door.

“Mrs. Johnson, will you please tell us where to go?” inquired Jennie, politely.

“Go to the hop yard, of course, and don’t open this kitchen door again. I don’t allow pickers here,” said the angry little woman, slamming the door in their faces.

Very much crestfallen they went back to their companions. “We’ve got to explore again, girls,” said Jennie. “It seems to be the fashion to find out things for yourself on this plantation.”

So they went to their rooms, put on sunbonnets, overshoes, and gloves, with shawls and waterproofs, as the morning was chilly, and then started off, with Jennie at their head, to make new discoveries. A fog hid the view, but the sound of voices directed them a few yards from the house, and soon they came near enough to see tall hop poles covered with fragrant vines, and as they came nearer they found groups of

girls whom they recognized as the ragamuffins of the breakfast table. These were standing by rough, pine boxes divided by partitions into four compartments or bins, one of which was assigned to each girl, and into which they were throwing the plump, pale-green hops, which they pulled from sprays torn from the vine still clinging to its pole. The pole leaned conveniently near, one end resting on a sort of ridge pole which ran across the tops of the boxes and a few feet above them.

“Can you tell us if there are any boxes for us?” asked Jennie of one of these girls.

“No, I don’t know nothin’ about it,” she answered, looking at the newcomer with disfavor.

“There’s the boss! Ye kin ask him,” said another girl, with a good-natured face.

Just then a burly man with a red face and wearing a blue flannel shirt came up and Jennie, putting her question to him, was directed to another part of the yard where some empty boxes were standing. After writing their names in a little book which he took from a pocket in his

shirt he was going away when Jennie called to him impatiently, "Please tell us how we are to get these poles up to our boxes. I'm sure we can never cut them down and drag them to us."

The boss looked at her with surprise and contempt. "Hain't you never picked hops?" he exclaimed scornfully.

"No, never," answered Jennie, smiling. "We're all 'greenhorns.'"

The boss looked at the party for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders, merely remarking: "Yell 'hops' and the pole pullers will bring 'em to you. Here you, John and Simmons and Perry, tend these six boxes," he called to some rough, rowdyish-looking men who were standing round a box talking and laughing with the four girls there.

The men left the girls reluctantly, as they came lounging forward, pulling large knives from their pockets with which they cut the juicy stems of the vines near the ground and then pulled the tall poles by main strength. These were deeply sunk in the ground, and it seemed

like pulling up trees by the roots, as the brawny, young giants tugged and dragged, all the while pouring out a steady stream of profanity as naturally as a schoolboy whistles.

Rhoda covered her ears with her hands, and all the girls looked sober and disgusted as they stood watching the operation. After a while the poles yielded with loud cracks, the boxes were supplied, each with two poles, and at last the wonderful operation of hop picking actually began.

CHAPTER VI

GETTING USED TO IT

THE girls gathered round the six "stands" and began to laugh and sing over the pretty work. The sun looked out from the white fog presently and lighted up a picturesque scene. The tall poles were completely hidden by the heavy vines, whose dark green leaves were sparkling with dew, and beautifully contrasted with the bunches of delicately green hops which they partially hid.

The poles were fast coming down, leaving little cleared spaces round the boxes which stood several yards apart. The groups of pickers round them, dressed in many colors and partly hidden by the branching vines, added to the picturesqueness, and made the yard seen from a little distance a charming picture.

"Oh, isn't this lovely!" chorused the girls.

“Perfectly splendid!” cried Jennie. “How delicious these hops smell, and picking them is just fun. Our trials are all over and victory is won! There, I didn’t mean to make a rhyme.”

“I think they have just commenced,” said Ada Fay. “I’m sure I can never fill this great box with these little things, and standing up is so tiresome.”

“Hitch up on the edge of the box and rest,” said Jennie, suiting the action to the word. Frequent rests were needed by all the girls as they were not used to standing. They were a good deal discouraged in the first hours of the new work.

“I don’t see how that other set manages to keep at it so steadily,” remarked Nelly Morton. “I’ve been watching them all morning and they don’t stop a moment. Used to it, I suppose.”

“Yes, that’s it,” said Rhoda, cheerfully, “and we shall soon be used to it, when it won’t be so hard.”

Near the close of the forenoon Jennie ran

over to a neighboring stand where Kitty Dill, the twins, and a fourth companion were stationed. "How do you like it, little sisters?" said she, briskly.

"Oh, it's nice, but it makes my back ache," answered Kitty.

"I'm as hungry as I can be," said one of the twins, pushing back her sunbonnet and showing a red face, for the day had grown warm.

"But we've been having a good time. Kitty has been telling us fairy stories," said Jessie Morton.

"How much money will we make, Jen, do you suppose?" said Kitty, pulling off a long spray, picking the hops from it one by one, and throwing them deliberately into the box.

"Not much, at that rate. Why, look here, chicks! This is the way to do. Pick a handful at a time. You can leave three in a bunch and get on ever so much faster. Your boxes aren't half full yet and we've got ours all ready to empty, or rather, all but Ada Fay. There

comes the box-tender with the sacks," said she, flying off to her place.

The box-tender, whom the boss called John, emptied the boxes of Flora, Jennie, Tilly Mickells, and Ada Fay. Each girl in turn held the sack open while the man filled it with great armfuls of the hops, which he deftly lifted from the box with much deep breathing.

"Hain't very smart hands, be ye?" he remarked, good-naturedly, freeing his mouth from tobacco juice as he spoke.

"What do you call being smart?" asked Jennie.

"Well, the best pickers fill their four boxes regular, and most of 'em allow to pick three sure."

"Dear me! One box a day is more than I can fill," said Ada Fay, leaning idly against her half-filled box.

"Green hand at it, I reckon," he said, looking at her carelessly.

Ada's sharp chin went up scornfully as she turned her head away without replying.

“Yes, we are green,” said Jennie, laughing. “But we shan’t always be so. I don’t propose to be beaten by anybody in this yard! So here goes!” And the hops flew into the box from her nimble fingers with a soft thud.

“You’re a plucky one,” said John, admiringly, as he shouldered the bulky sack and walked off.

“I don’t see how you can talk to those odious fellows,” said Ada, crossly.

“Well, we must have more or less of their company, and it seems to me the best policy to make friends of them if we can. Hark! that must be the call to dinner.”

A loud blast from a horn was heard in the direction of the house, and every soul left the hop yard as though fleeing from destruction.

“Hurry! Hurry!” shouted Tilly Mickells. “The ragamuffins are ahead of us and we shall be late again,” and she dashed off followed by the rest, with more or less speed.

Rhoda was too dignified to run. “I’ll go without my dinner if I must scramble for it,” she

said to Ann Mathers, who was walking by her side and who was never known to hurry under any circumstances. When they reached the house they found the washbowls and towels all in use. The box-tenders were on the ground first and were using them, while a ragged, hungry, sunburned crowd of girls stood waiting for their turn.

Hop picking is very clean work if one is prepared for it, but if it is done with bare hands, a dark, sticky substance like glue clings to the fingers and leaves a disagreeable odor which is only removed by hard rubbing. The Minnichute girls found, by taking off their thick, long gloves which protected their hands and sleeves, and the long aprons which covered them from throat to ankle, together with the big sunbonnets which kept unruly locks from flying about, they could make a very respectable appearance at the dinner table without waiting their turn at the wash-bowl.

“I could never use those soiled towels,” said May Becket in disgust.

The dinner was excellent and abundant, and the girls had sharp appetites for it after spending the whole forenoon in the open air. "We eat like thrashers," said Tilly Mickells, who had lived on a farm.

"I don't believe they will make much out of us if it takes such a lot of good things to feed us," said Myra Jennings, when they were tying on their bonnets again.

"Our box-tender told us Mrs. Johnson wouldn't keep pickers who didn't fill at least one box a day, and she expects us to average three," remarked one of the girls.

"Oh, dear! I think she is an awful task-master," sighed one of the twins.

"No one ever says anything about Mr. Johnson," observed May Becket.

"Oh, he's henpecked," said Flora. "I heard our box-tender telling another that the little woman kept him at the hop house all the time to attend to the drying, and that everything about the place had to go as she orders. John says

he has been here three seasons, and he has never seen Mr. Johnson in the hop yard.”

The work in the afternoon dragged somewhat. The hot sun was wilting and the odor of the hops made the girls sleepy. But the fear of the tyrant at the house kept many tired fingers of the little girls at work until each box was filled once, when they felt at liberty to rest and dawdle as much as they pleased.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN IS ADOPTED

THEY soon fell into a routine and were quite at home. Most of them were so tired and sleepy at night they didn't mind the hard beds, and the good food, the out-of-door life, and the jolly laughing, singing, and chatting going on all the time made the days seem a continuous picnic.

The little girls were particularly happy. After a few days' practice they became expert pickers, usually working industriously in the mornings and playing afternoons.

They soon adopted John, petting him and tyrannizing over him by turns. He seemed to like it and became their willing slave, never being too busy or too tired to wait on them and look after their comfort. One day he took Jessie Morton's shoe to the hop house to pound

down a nail that hurt her foot, again he found a pin to fasten together a rent in another little girl's apron. He ran on errands for them and to the house for forgotten wraps, and was always prompt to bring hop poles or fresh water whenever he heard their shrill voices calling for them. He even coaxed a nervous little girl to let him pull out the loose tooth that troubled her.

The whole party were usually tired enough to go to bed soon after the six o'clock supper, and while they were undressing they generally chatted, exchanging experiences and the news of the day.

"What a jolly girl you are, Jennie Dill," remarked Minnie Waters one night, as she sat on her bed brushing her bright hair. "We can hear you laughing all the time down by our stand. It almost makes us jolly, too."

"Why don't you laugh on your own account?" asked Jennie. "Don't you like it here?"

"Yes, better than I did. I was awful home-

sick at first. Got used to it now, I suppose. But that Ann Mathers is so solemn and poky we can't have much fun at our stand on her account."

"Why don't you chat with your box-tenders?"

"Oh, they're too horrid! I don't want to encourage them."

"I don't see how you girls can do it!" said May Becket. "I can't bear to speak to them, and I always feel relieved when Perry goes away from my box."

"I hate that old Perry," said Kitty, wrathfully. "He's always chucking me under my chin, and calls me 'sissy.'"

"He probably thinks you're a little girl, my dear. We will have to tell him you belong to the grown-ups," remarked Myra Jennings.

"Perry and Simmons are improving, aren't they, May?" asked Jennie.

"Yes, I suppose they are," admitted May. "Rhoda is civilizing them. She talks to them

in her polite way, and to-day Simmons seemed almost bashful."

"Well, Flora told John we weren't used to swearing and didn't like it. Since then he never swears near our stand, and told us he was trying to break himself of the habit. We all like him, he is so good-natured and kind."

"John is more decent than the rest of them. If I had him to work on I might try missionary work, too."

"Has any one found out who the Princess is?" asked Nelly. "John told me to-day that she is Mrs. Johnson's niece. She's a widow. John doesn't like her. He says she's too temp-ery and toppin' to suit him. She's poor and lives with Mrs. Johnson because she has no other home," said Flora.

"I'd go to the poor house before I'd live with Vinegar-Pot!" said Tilly, shaking her head.

"I'm glad I don't have to do either. I'd rather be a plain hop picker," remarked Nina Taylor.

"Plain hop pickers are tired and sleepy at

bed time. They'd better stop chattering and go to sleep," said Rhoda's gentle voice from her dim corner. They all agreed and there was no more talk that night.

The next afternoon several of the little girls collected round "Number One," as Flora's and Jennie's "stand" was called, as it stood first in the row. The day was unusually warm and some of them felt rather sleepy, when one little girl noticed several partly filled sacks which John had left near the stand. "What a nice place for a nap!" she cried, curling up on one of them.

A dozen others followed her example, lying close together on the soft beds, most of them closing their eyes at once. But they were not allowed to enjoy this luxury very long. The boss came hurrying up, saying angrily: "Here, you! git out o' this! It's agin the rules to lay on the hops. Go to work now! Ye didn't come here to fool round, did ye?"

They all jumped up, mortified at the scolding and disgusted by the rudeness of the boss. No

one said a word to him, and after muttering something about getting "docked" if he ever "seen 'em at it agin," he walked off, leaving the party angrily discussing his impudence.

"Oh, never you mind Jim Peters," said John, when he was told of the incident. "He means well enough, but he's got the 'big head' because he's boss this year. He ain't used to it."

"But does it really hurt the hops to lie on them?" asked Flora.

"Well, I don't s'pose it does 'em any good, but I reckon they ain't spiled by it."

"I wonder who told that horrid man we were lying on them," said Ada Fay.

"Them critters over there, I reckon," answered John, nodding toward the bare-footed band who were looking in their direction and laughing loudly.

"Who are those girls?" asked Rhoda.

"A low-down set from over beyond Mud Creek. Mostly Irish and Dutch. Johnson's folks like 'em 'cause they're such good pickers, but they're always rowin' round nights and

havin' fights. They've been pretty civil so far. Reckon they're a little afraid of the missus."

"John!" called Flora, beckoning at the same time to the box-tender, who grinned and walked to where she was standing behind a pole whose vine made a screen from the Mud Creekites.

The Minnichute girls could not hear what was said, but they saw Flora smile as she looked up into John's face, and then point to a sack of hops. He left her standing there, and presently came back with a large bag, well-filled, which he placed in the shadow of the vine. Flora lay down on it and the box-tender left her for other duties.

"Flora has begun to wind John round her finger," remarked Nelly.

"Well, he seems to enjoy it," said Jennie, laughing.

"But, I say, that ain't fair!" protested Jessie. "Flora always gets the best of everything herself."

"John belongs to us. Flora has no business to get him away," cried Jessie's twin.

“I’m going to ask him to make a bed for us where the boss can’t see us,” announced Kitty Dill.

“But John’s gone,” remarked Nelly, pushing back her sunbonnet and looking around. “Besides, he probably wouldn’t do it for you.”

“Why, yes, he would too, Nelly. He does everything we ask him to,” protested her little sister, indignantly. “Let’s go and get him, girls, and see if he won’t,” she went on.

They ran off together and before very long the older girls saw them lying in a row on well-filled sacks by the side of the sleeping Flora.

“That isn’t right, John,” protested Jennie, when the box-tender came to her box in a few minutes after this. “We ought to obey the rules of the place.”

“Don’t you worry,” he said, laughing. “You’ll see there ain’t no harm done. I’m just gittin’ even with Peters. He’ll be round pretty soon and then we’ll have some fun.”

“I hope he won’t be cross to our little girls,”

said Rhoda anxiously. "I really think they should not be lying on those bags."

She began to walk toward the children, but before she reached them the boss hurried to the little group and angrily ordered them to leave the bags. Flora rose at once and went back to her stand, but the children appeared to be sleeping soundly. Their faces were hidden by their sunbonnets, but when Rhoda came nearer she saw their little bodies shaking, and one or two of them giggled outright.

"Wait a minute, Rhoda. It's a joke. Don't spoil our fun," whispered Kitty, when her sister tried to make her rise.

The boss was furious, as he saw that the children were awake and defying his authority. He put his hand on the shoulder of the child nearest to him and shook her roughly.

"You let my pickers alone, Peters!" cried John, coming up behind the boss and speaking in a threatening tone.

"I ain't a-goin' to have 'em lyin' on the hops. You know it's agin' the rules as well as I do,"

said Peters, stepping out of range of John's long arms.

"'You're interferin' in what's none o' your business. Them girls is goin' to sleep on them sacks as long as they please,'" returned John in a blustering manner, and emphasizing his words by striking one closed fist in the palm of the other hand.

The boss seemed cowed, and fell back as John stepped toward him, and began mumbling under his breath. The older girls were standing in a circle back of the men, waiting to see how the matter would end. They felt sure that John was wrong and that the boss had a right to enforce the rules, but Kitty's hint made them think best to wait a little before interfering.

Several box-tenders also came up to the group to see what was going on. Peters was very unpopular in the hop yard. He was considered a coward and a bully, while John was respected and liked by everybody. No one had any sympathy with the boss in his dilemma. At the same time, the spirit in the yard, among the

men, at least, was in favor of "fair play." Some of them now felt obliged to take sides with Peters. "See here, Jack, that ain't right. You know it spiles the hops to lay on 'em," began Simmons, protestingly.

"That ain't the question," returned John. "Pete says my girls can't take a nap on them bags. I say they can."

"Pete didn't make the rule. He's got to do as Johnson says. You know that, Jack," said Perry.

"All right, I'm willin' to leave it to Johnson, and if you fellers are goin' to take a hand in this row you go git him, and if he sides with Peters, I'll stand treat to the crowd," returned John, in his usual, good-natured voice.

The men were puzzled and believed that some trick was being played. But there seemed nothing else to do, so Perry and Simmons ran up to the hop house and came back immediately, almost dragging the unwilling Mr. Johnson between them.

"What's this mean, Jack," he said, mildly,

when the situation was explained to him. "You know we can't have folks lyin' on the hops, don't ye?"

"Of course I do, Mr. Johnson. You never caught me breakin' no rules, did ye? My pickers ain't lyin' on no hops," said John calmly.

"Well, what's all this row about then?" said the bewildered man.

"Come here and see!" The little girls jumped up laughing and ran away, while John opened a number of the sacks and showed that they were filled with straw.

There was a roar of laughter and clapping of hands in the crowd, which now numbered most of the pickers in the yard. The joke was on Peters. Mr. Johnson looked relieved and slipped away, while the boss ran to the barn and locked himself in to escape the teasing which immediately began.

"I think you were a little too hard on Peters, John," said Jennie, when they were talking the matter over later. "He was doing what he thought was right."

“Well, he needn’t ’a’ been so uppish about it,” replied John. “I reckon he’s learned a thing or two, and he’ll quit bein’ rough to my pickers, anyhow.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE HOP PICKING CONTEST

“**J**UST been pullin’ a pole for that humbly girl in your crowd,” remarked John, coming up to No. One. “I never see her beat for slowness.”

“I suppose you mean Ann Mathers,” said Jennie. “I’m surprised to hear that about her, for she told me she picked three boxes a day regularly.”

“I reckon she does. But she keeps at it early and late. Never lets up a minute, but just keeps peggin’ away all the time. If she was a fast picker she’d make her five boxes a day. But, my goodness! You girls could pick round her forty times a day.”

“Flora is our champion picker,” said Jennie. “If she’d try I believe she’d beat the whole yard.”

Flora smiled complacently, but she said:

"Oh, no, Jennie! I only pick three boxes a day at the most, and I often fall short of that."

"But that's because you don't half try," said Jennie. "You spend less time in picking than any of us."

Just then Nina Taylor came running up, laughing. "Flora, what do you suppose Ann Mathers said just now?" she asked.

"Can't imagine."

"Well, we were laughing at her slowness, and she said that she picked as much as any one and she believed she could beat you in a match because you are too lazy to stick to anything, even for one day."

"Tell her I'll race with her to-morrow," said Flora, nettled at the uncomplimentary opinion of plain Ann Mathers.

Nina ran off, delighted to "put down" the stupid girl who made herself so disagreeable by her never-ending industry and her disapproval of the frivolous chatter about her. For Nina had no doubt that the contest would end in Flora's favor.

Ann agreed to the match very readily, and it was arranged to come off the next day. There was a good deal of fun and laughter round the Minnichute boxes that afternoon, as the affair became known. The box-tenders were much interested, taking sides with one or the other of the contestants.

The next morning, when the girls reached the yard, they found Ann Mathers at her post, sober, as usual, and working in her slow fashion.

“Well, Ann,” said Jennie, laughing as she passed her, “you certainly have the start of Flora. Did you stay here all night?”

“No,” said the literal Ann. “I came out right after breakfast. I asked Simmons to pull a pole for me last night so I needn’t lose any time.”

“Well, I must tell Flora to look out or she’ll be beaten after all,” said Jennie, briskly calling “hops” on her way to her box.

But Flora did not come to the yard until some time after the others were at work, for

she meant to show every one that she need not hurry. She had a wrap over her arm and carried a book which she had smuggled along with her finery, and which she often read during her frequent rests on the straw sack.

“You don’t intend to read to-day, do you?” exclaimed Ada Fay.

“Why not,” answered Flora, as she threw down her waterproof and book and drew on her long gloves.

“Ann Mathers has been at work for two hours, Flora,” said Jennie, anxiously. “You really ought to pitch in in earnest now.”

“Oh, don’t worry, Jen,” said Flora, carelessly, as she commenced to pick the uncommonly large hops which John had brought to her. It was all he could do, for by the terms of the agreement no one was to help the rival pickers by as much as a single hop.

Flora worked steadily, but without seeming to be in haste, until her box was full, which was a few minutes before Ann was ready to have hers emptied for the first time. Of

course, there was a good deal of running back and forth between the boxes that forenoon to watch the progress of the race.

“Why, Ann, what makes you think you can beat Flora?” asked Kitty. “She’s ahead of you already, and you had ever so much the start.”

“Just wait and see,” answered Ann, stolidly, as she picked away steadily and slowly.

When Flora’s first box was emptied she seated herself on her sack and began to read. She intended to show her contempt for Ann Mathers and her opinion by taking more leisure than usual on this day. John and the little girls regarded her coolness with great admiration and no one had a doubt that she would win. Of course Ann’s progress was reported to her from time to time, also the fact that her box-tender was scouring the yard for vines with the largest, thickest bunches of hops, and that he never kept her waiting a minute for a fresh vine.



"I must finish this chapter first," answered Flora, with her eyes still fixed on the book.

“She’s got her second box half full, Flora. Don’t you think you’d better begin on yours?” said Minnie Waters, rather anxiously.

“I must finish this chapter first,” answered Flora, with her eyes still fixed on her book.

John had a splendid vine ready for her when she finally went to work, and by the time the dinner horn sounded her box was filled and emptied not a minute behind Ann, who had taken twice the time for the same task.

“I swan to goodness!” exclaimed John. “I never see the beat of such pickin’. Perry must be sick,” he went on in disgust, “to bet on that snail over there.”

Flora laughed gayly, and John hastened away to crow over Perry, who had little to say when told of Flora’s marvelous swiftness.

Indeed, the interest in the race had rather died away by dinner-time, as it had been clearly proved a one-sided affair. After dinner Flora filled her third box long before her rival had done the same, and then, declaring

that she was going to take a long nap and on no account was she to be disturbed, she was soon asleep in the shade of a friendly vine.

Ann hardly lifted her eyes from her work when this fact was reported to her, and no one could tell from the expression of her face that she had either hope or fear as to the result of the race. The afternoon hours glided along. The girls worked and played and gossiped round their stands, as usual, and Flora was almost forgotten until all at once it was discovered that Ann Mathers was picking on the last half of her fourth box, and that the sun was throwing long shadows, telling them there was but a short time before supper.

“Perry, why didn’t you tell me how late it was?” cried Minnie Waters in dismay, when after a long nap she had herself taken, she discovered the state of affairs.

“I hadn’t got no call to tell ye,” said Perry, with a grin. “But I reckon t’other one might as well hang up her fiddle. We’ve got her beat.”

“Well, I don’t think it’s fair,” said Minnie, running off to Flora’s stand.

Jennie had tried once or twice during the last hour to waken Flora, who begged impatiently to be left alone to finish her nap, declaring that there was plenty of time. But when Minnie came to her with the news she sprang to her work in earnest.

John stood by her box with an anxious face. He had been called to the hop house to help Mr. Johnson with the presses, and had left his post with an inexperienced box-tender, very reluctantly, for though he had no fears of the result he wanted to be on hand to watch the contest. He had only just returned, and found to his astonishment that Flora had been asleep all the afternoon.

“Girls, what *made* you let me sleep so long!” cried Flora, reproachfully.

“Let you!” echoed Jennie, indignantly. “Didn’t you give orders not to waken you, and didn’t I try my best to get your eyes open in spite of that? I call that mean!”

“So it is,” said Flora. “I ought to be ashamed of myself, and I am.”

Jennie’s good nature came back instantly. “I believe it will come out all right yet if you hurry,” she said, encouragingly.

Flora’s fingers were flying now with the greatest speed. But seven bushels of hops cannot be picked in a moment, and consequently her box was only half full when the supper horn sounded.

Ann’s fourth box had been emptied by the jeering Perry. Ann stood silently receiving the congratulations of a crowd of girls, and Fanny Jennings was about to pin on her sleeve a bit of ribbon which they had agreed should be worn by the winner as a badge of championship.

Flora was very much chagrined. John said nothing, but he looked hurt and disappointed, and shook his fist in Perry’s face when the latter came up to tantalize him.

“It’s too bad, Flo,” said Jennie, sympathizingly, saying not a word of reproach.

Minnie was not so generous. "It's all Flo's fault," she declared angrily. "I haven't a bit of patience with her. Now that horrid Ann Mathers will be more disgustingly conceited than ever. I'm going to pick at some other stand."

"John!" said Flora, suddenly. "I'm coming out to pick after supper. Nothing has been said about the time, and I'm not going to call the contest ended."

"That's so!" declared John, much delighted. "There's quite a spell before dark. Just you git your supper and hurry back, and I'll be findin' a lot of good vines for you."

The opposite side objected to this arrangement, but as there had been no time limit specified, they were obliged to yield. Supper was eaten quickly, and they were back in their places, each contestant surrounded by an eager crowd.

But the daylight was going fast. It was hard to tell hops from leaves. "Never you mind!" said John. "I'll have a light here in no

time.” And running to the hop house, he soon came back with a lighted lantern.

Perry had one for Ann almost as quickly and the excitement was running high, when a loud and angry toot from the dinner horn was heard in the direction of the house. “That’s the missus!” said John, in dismay. “She’s heard of this and don’t mean to allow it.”

“Oh, John,” said Flora, eagerly. “If I can only have fifteen minutes, I can win, I know I can.”

“Well,” said John, “go ahead! Perhaps we can make it yet.”

But the picking was not allowed to go on. The boss came up and commanded them to stop. “It’s agin the rules,” he said, “to pick after daylight.”

“But we have a good light, don’t you see,” began Flora.

“It don’t make no difference,” he interrupted. “You’ve got to quit.”

“Who says so?” demanded John. “I never

heard of such a rule, and I don't believe there is one!"

"Well, I've got orders to have 'em quit right off," said the boss, backing away from John, "and if you don't believe it you'll soon see for yourself. Mrs. Johnson will be here in a minute. She left the house when I did, and she's mad as a hornet."

This terrible announcement made a great panic at once. The girls tumbled off their perches on the boxes and fled to the house, Flora with them, as much frightened as any one.

The alarm was a false one, made by the boss entirely for effect. Mrs. Johnson had not even heard of the contest. When this was discovered it was too late to go back to the hop yard. Ann was declared winner by a quarter of a box and Flora went to bed very much chagrined.

John was very angry when he found how the boss had fooled them, and declared that he would punish him the next time he saw him.

But he concluded to say nothing about it when Simmons reminded him that it was a case of "tit-for-tat." Peters' trick was no worse than his own, and he would have to call matters even.

CHAPTER IX

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

THE next day was their first Sunday in the hop region. Breakfast was two hours later than usual, which gave the girls time for a more thorough use of the washbowls than usual, and to dress as they did at home.

The short calico gowns were exchanged for neat, dark woollen ones, brightened by bows of bright ribbons and collars and cuffs of embroidery and lace. There was much frizzing and curling and coiling of hair which had hung in straight braids for so many days. It was a great transformation. The long-aproned, sun-bonneted, striped gloved hop pickers, all looking alike, had turned into a bevy of fair, tastefully dressed young girls. Even Ann Mathers, who was no beauty, looked neat and fresh and quite a lady, with a pink bow at her throat and

white collar and cuffs on her plain alpaca dress.

“Don’t we look nice!” said Nina Taylor, settling down on the edge of the porch where the company had collected to wait for the tardy breakfast.

“I like myself ever so much better in good clothes,” remarked Myra Jennings.

“So does every one,” said Nelly Morton. “I think nice clothes are necessary for self-respect.”

“They make people respect you anyway,” added her sister Jessie.

The “Low Downs” must be an exception to that rule,” remarked Lizzie Becket, looking toward a group of girls waiting near the dining-room door. They were dressed in the dirty rags worn during the week, with hair uncombed and feet bare.

“Mercy! how wrathful they look!” exclaimed Jennie. “They’d like to tear us to pieces.”

“I believe Mrs. Vinegar-Pot thinks we’re all like those girls, and that’s the reason she

treats us so mean," exclaimed Tilly Mickells, alighting on the truth with a shrewd guess, for Mrs. Johnson had been too busy to make any inquiries about the new pickers and had hardly given them a thought during the week. The agent had been told to get girls who were used to out-of-door work and rough fare. She supposed the order had been carried out, and so after glancing at their short dresses, coarse shoes, and sunbonnets when they arrived, she had set them down as the usual ignorant, brawling crew which must be fought and endured until the season was over.

But one glance at the transformed party at the breakfast table this Sunday morning showed her that she had been deceived. By inquiry she found that she had twenty-two daughters of the best families of Minnichute and Atwood, whom she had been treating with very little courtesy, to say the least.

Mr. Johnson had to bear the brunt of her vexation. The poor man had been afraid to tell her that he had not brought home the usual

sort for fear that she would send them back again. Her belief was strong that village girls were of "no account" to work. The demand for pickers had been so great this year that it was impossible to get enough experienced pickers, so the villages, towns, and cities had been canvassed to supply the demand, and growers generally had been glad to secure "hands" from any quarter. So he had taken these village girls, and tried to palm them off on his wife. But Mrs. Johnson had a good deal of hard sense. The girls had proved good pickers and made no extra trouble, so she resolved to make the best of things as they were.

After breakfast the girls wandered around the grounds and hop yard, in the soft September sunshine. Some of them sat down in groups to enjoy a quiet chat under the trees, and many home letters were scribbled with lead pencils.

About ten o'clock a shining, new carriage and a handsome pair of bay horses drove up to the gate. Mrs. Johnson rustled out of the house

followed by the beautiful "Princess." They were both fashionably dressed, although they would have looked rather outlandish in these days of short scant skirts.

Mrs. Johnson's black silk gown and Miranda's light "sprigged delaine," had full skirts, at least six yards around the bottom, and were long enough to touch the ground. They were distended over crinoline, or "hoop skirts," as village people called this article of dress, and they swayed and dipped like balloons in a light breeze as they walked along. The shoulder seams of their waists were very long, extending several inches down their arms, and the large full sleeves were like those of a Bishop's gown. Mrs. Johnson wore a white straw bonnet trimmed with white ribbon, which was pleated into a cape or "frill" at the back of the bonnet. Rows of this ribbon adorned the crown and long strings tied the expensive head gear under her plump chin, while a row of artificial pink roses were nestled in soft "tulle" inside of the flaring front.

Miranda's head covering was also fashionable, though very unlike her companion's fine bonnet. It was also made of white straw and was called a "flat." It had a very wide drooping brim with a low crown trimmed with a wreath of green leaves and red berries. Both wore black lace "mitts" on their hands, and on their high cut waists wide crocheted lace collars. Mrs. Johnson walked up to a group of girls, and to their utter astonishment said with a smile, "You'll find some books to read if you like in the bookcase in the settin' room," and handing a key to Rhoda, she and the princess stepped into the carriage and drove away to church in the village two miles away.

"My! don't they look *grand!*" exclaimed Tilly, when they were gone. "I wish we could have brought our hoop skirts along; I feel ashamed to be seen without mine."

"But you know the agent said you mustn't wear 'em 'cause there wouldn't be room in the wagons if you did," remarked Hattie.

"Yes, I know," said Tilly, "but Ada and

Nina and Minnie managed to bring theirs. The clerk in Ada's father's store wrapped them up for them, so they were about as big as a pancake."

"I'm glad Vinegar Pot and the Princess will see that some of us know the fashions any way," said Flora. "Ada brought her balmoral petticoat too," she went on, "and she's going to show us sometime how she loops her skirt over it."

"The balmoral is the very latest fashion," remarked Nina. "She's got it on now, perhaps she'll show us this afternoon how she works the looping business."

"Oh, goody!" cried Tilly clapping her hands. "Ada will make old Vinegar Pot and the Princess green with envy."

"What is a balmoral?" asked Jessie. "I never saw one."

"Oh, you green horn; I've seen lots of 'em," said a very little girl, in a piping voice.

"Where'd you see 'em, Mousy?" asked Tilly. "It must have been in your dreams, for Ada

says hers is the only one in Minnichute. Her father bought it in Chicago."

"Well, anyhow, I saw Ada's skirt a lot of times," said little Mousy snuggling down by Rhoda's side on the grass.

"Perhaps Ada will show us her loops now," said Rhoda, with her arm round Mousy.

"Of course I will," said Ada good naturedly, when half a dozen voices made the request. She put her hand through a slit in the skirt of her green silk gown and pulled a string concealed beneath it, causing her dress to rise mysteriously in loops or scallops, showing a gorgeous striped petticoat. The stripes were three or four inches wide with black ones of the same width between the bright-blue, red and yellow ones. They all ran horizontally around over a large full crinoline. The girls oh'd and ah'd their wonder and admiration, and then the irrepressible Tilly remarked:

"Why, you look like a barber's pole, swelled into a balloon."

Many of the girls laughed, and Ada, deeply

offended, lowered the wonderful loops and walked away. Tilly ran after her to apologize, while Rhoda unlocked the book-case and many of the girls selected books, according to their various tastes. The books were all new and handsomely bound, looking as though they had never been used, and were the usual assortment of History, Travels, Poetry and Fiction.

The "Low Downs" had by this time gone out of sight and hearing. It was very quiet through the house and grounds, in delicious contrast to the noise of the week. The girls found quiet nooks and corners with their books and writing materials, enjoying very much their new-found comfort.

Mousy was a very clever little girl. She had a sharp nose and shrewd bright eyes, and was the leader of the younger set in fun and mischief. She had watched Mrs. Johnson and Miranda when they walked to their carriage, and after the older girls were settled quietly reading or writing, she seemed to be in a brown study, and then suddenly jumped up and called

to the other members of the "trundle bed trash," as the youngsters were named. They were playing among the vines of the hop yard, but when they heard her voice, they were sure she had some new scheme for them, and hurried to her. After whispering to them a moment, they all trooped off to the hop house in a state of giggles.

"Mousy has thought of some new mischief," remarked Tilly, as the children rushed away.

"Well, at least we'll have a little peace and quiet while they're gone," said Flora, turning over a leaf in her book.

In about half an hour the mischief makers came marching back, a funny little procession. In some mysterious way they had contrived to make their full dresses stand out from their bodies, in a grotesque imitation of crinoline. On Kitty's head was perched the large round cover of a cheese box, a hole, several inches wide in the middle allowing this evident imitation of a "flat" to fit her head.

Hattie and Jessie wore big poke bonnets,

fashioned from paste board boxes, with rows of pink hollyhocks inside the flaring brims. The others wore large leaves of rhubarb on their heads for "flats," and some of them had collars made from white paper notched and scalloped with many holes in them to look like crocheted work.

As they came swaying and dipping their ridiculous little skirts and holding their heads back affectedly, with haughty expressions on their round faces, they were plainly mimicking Mrs. Johnson and the Princess.

The older girls recognized the burlesque at once and burst into peals of laughter, Tilly and Nina rolling on the grass and holding their sides.

"Where on earth did you get those hoop skirts," asked Tilly when she could speak.

"That's our secret, and we don't tell secrets," said Mousy mockingly.

At a word from the leader they all whirled around, spreading out their skirts and made "cheeses" by squatting suddenly on the ground.

“Let’s catch ’em and find out what they have on,” said Ada springing toward the group. The other big girls also made a rush forward, but the youngsters were too quick for them, and ran screaming to the hop house. All would have reached their refuge in safety, if Hattie hadn’t lost her bonnet and stopped to pick it up, when she was captured and ignominiously examined.

“For mercy’s sake,” cried Jennie laughing immoderately. “If the little tykes haven’t run the wire they use for baling hops into the tucks and hems of their petticoats!”

“Well, it’s just for fun, Jen, and I think it’s mean for you to go and find out our secret,” said Hattie angrily and almost crying.

“Yes, of course, you did it for fun, dear, and there’s no harm in it and it certainly was awfully funny. But won’t you please tell us how you managed to get the wire cut just the right length, and who made those excruciating bonnets and flats.”

“Two of the boxtenders, but I promised not to tell on them and I’m not going to,” said the

child grinning, now quite happy and relieved since they were not to be scolded for their little escapade.

“Here comes the carriage!” cried Tilly. “Hurry, Hattie, and tell the others to take off their flats and bonnets and wires as quick as they can. If Mrs. Johnson saw you making fun of her she would be mad, and perhaps she’d send us all home.”

The frightened child sped to the hop house with flying feet and in a few moments she and her companions came back looking as demure as harmless kittens. When the great bays drove up, two flashily dressed young men jumped from the carriage, helped Mrs. Johnson and the princess to the ground, and then walked with them to the house.

Presently the blinds of windows were opened in a part of the house which had been closed. The girls caught glimpses of white lace curtains, gold frames against the walls, and crimson velvet furniture. A careless hand drawn across a keyboard told them they had been

separated from a grand piano only by a wall.

“What a shame that we didn’t know of that before!” cried Jennie, indignantly.

“You must remember, dear,” said Rhoda, “that Mrs. Johnson engaged us to pick her hops and not to play on her piano. We have really nothing to complain of but our sleeping-quarters.”

“That’s so,” said Jennie. “We’re nothing but hop pickers, and we mustn’t expect too much condescension from our betters. Nevertheless, I’m hungry and thirsting for that piano.”

“I wonder where she picked up those dandies!” said Tilly.

“They don’t belong round here,” remarked Ada.

“My! what a contrast to the pole-pullers,” added Minnie.

“What a comfort it is to see a gentleman once more,” said Nina, with a sigh.

“Pooh!” cried Jennie. “‘Fine feathers make fine birds.’ Those fellows had very com-

mon faces, and I don't think they were very polite. Did you see them stare at us?"

Jennie would have been confirmed in her impression if she had heard the conversation going on then in the parlor. Both young men had thrown their hats on the floor and were sprawling on the handsome sofas. One pair of shining boots went up on the velvet arm of a large chair, but came down again quickly when Mrs. Johnson called out sharply: "Sim, take your feet off that chair, and if you want to smoke, go out-doors," for a big cigar was now in the young man's mouth.

"Confound your furniture!" growled Sim. "What do you have things too fine to use for? When a feller comes home he wants to take some comfort."

"Well, this isn't a bar-room, sir! You needn't be a rowdy in your mother's parlor."

"You didn't use' to be so partic'lar, plague take your old hop money!" muttered Sim.

"What would you do without it?" angrily retorted his mother.

“Come, Aunt Sue,” said the other young man, breaking into the quarrel, “trot out your fancy hop pickers. After all your braggin’ we don’t want to see no common trash like you had last year.”

“Hold your tongue, Hi!” said Mrs. Johnson, sharply. “Didn’t I tell you they come from the top families of Atwood and Minnichute, and how under the sun they ever came here I can’t imagine. But here they be, and I want you two boys to put your best foot foremost, too.”

“Who be they?” asked Sim, rolling his unlighted cigar between his lips.

“There’s Dr. Becket’s two daughters, Old Fay’s girl, and two or three preacher’s families besides. So I tell you now, you’d better mind your manners and carry yourselves straight.”

The girls needed a good deal of urging to accept Mrs. Johnson’s invitation to go into the parlor. “I’d rather stay here and read,” said Rhoda, settling comfortably in her seat under a tree.

"I'd rather stay with Rhoda," said May, laughing and snuggling up to her.

"Oh, come, girls!" urged Jennie, who was Mrs. Johnson's messenger. "It isn't polite to refuse her invitation. She wants to introduce to us her son and nephew who are home from Madison to spend Sunday."

"The honor of their acquaintance would be too overwhelming," began Rhoda.

"Oh, never mind them," interrupted Jennie. "They're probably nobodys. But I'm just dying for that piano, and May plays like an angel, Minnie says."

"Do come, May," urged some of the other girls together.

"You can't be so cruel as to refuse," pleaded Jennie, on her knees, and clasping May's hand.

"If we don't go in we'll vex Vinegar-Pot and she'll be as mean as ever to us," remarked Kitty, thinking this argument might do some good.

"Well," assented May, rising. "There

seems no help for it. I suppose I'll have to go."

Rhoda was too good-natured to hold out. She rose from her seat and they all trooped after her to the house.

CHAPTER X

WHO STOLE THE DINNER?

MRS. Johnson made short work of the introduction. "Girls, this is my son and my nephew," she said, waving her hand in the direction of the young men, and then saying she must see to dinner, she walked away. Sim and Hi rose, made stiff bows right and left, and then sat down again, leaving the girls to find seats for themselves on the ottomans, chairs and sofas about the large room.

There was an awkward silence for a moment, when Rhoda and May, as the eldest of the party, began the usual small talk which opens conversation between strangers. But their refinement, their low voices, and their self-possession seemed to make the men more bashful than ever, and after the weather was discussed, the conversation was reduced to monosyllables

on one side and was fast dying out entirely, when some one proposed music.

Jennie flew from her seat and spasmodically dragged May to the piano. This movement broke the ice at once, and the giggling which commenced ended in a hearty laugh and a sudden flocking round the piano.

They found a Sunday school song book in a pile of music on a table. May played the air of a song they all knew, and they began singing as loudly and cheerily as possible, when they were interrupted by the sound of angry voices.

Sim Johnson and his cousin stepped out onto the porch to see what was the trouble and the girls heard him say: "Hullo, ma, what's up?"

"Some one has been in the cellar and stolen all I had cooked for dinner," returned his angry mother.

"Whew! that so? What'd ye have?" asked Hi, with his hands in his pockets.

"Two dozen pies, a dozen loaves of bread,

a jar of butter, a jar of preserves, besides about a peck of cookies and some chickens. It's them Mud Creekites, I expect, and I'll break every bone in their bodies when I catch 'em."

"Uncle says he hasn't seen any of 'em around this morning," said the princess. "More likely it's them white-livered town girls. They ain't a bit too good for it, in my opinion."

"That's false," cried Jennie, bounding out to the porch with a red face. "Mrs. Johnson, we haven't been near your cellar, and it's mean to accuse us of such a thing!"

"How are you going to prove it, Miss Stuck-up?" said the princess spitefully.

"What grounds have you for suspecting us?" retorted Jennie.

"The things couldn't go without hands, and you were the only ones about the place. I guess you wouldn't like to have your rooms searched."

"Indeed we would. Mrs. Johnson, please come and see for yourself," and she stalked at

the head of the procession, the princess at her elbow, and half a dozen girls following.

“What do you call them?” said the princess, pointing to a pile of pie plates, empty jars, and remnants of bread and cookies.

“It’s a mean trick!” declared Jennie, indignantly. “The real thieves have put them there, of course, to make you think we took them. You don’t suppose we would have brought you here if we hadn’t been innocent.”

“I don’t know,” said Mrs. Johnson in a hard tone, for she was much irritated. “It looks mighty suspicious. Perhaps you can’t answer for all your crowd. But you can be sure of one thing. You’ll have to go without your dinner to-day. You don’t catch me cookin’ on Sunday.”

The girls were too indignant to care for that, hungry as they were. They collected in their rooms and settled on the beds to hold an indignation meeting.

“It’s an abominable shame!” burst from Jennie.

“But what can we do about it?” asked Rhoda. “The evidence is against us. It’s rather ignominious, I must confess.”

“Mrs. Johnson is not so bright as I thought,” remarked May. “If we had stolen the things, common-sense ought to teach her that we would hide the signs of it.”

“Perhaps she thought we wouldn’t expect to have our rooms searched,” said Nina.

“At any rate, she thinks we did it,” said Minnie, “and I feel as though we had, too. I’m ashamed to show my face.”

“I think she was so mad she was glad to blame it onto any one,” remarked Myra.

“Let’s walk home,” suggested Jessie.

“No, indeed!” protested Jennie. “I won’t run away. I’ll stay and fight it out. I’ll find those thieves if it takes till Christmas!”

Ann Mathers had been sitting silently on her bed while the discussion was going on, and now she said in her thick, hoarse tones: “The Low Downs were barefooted this morning. The sand is always damp round the cellar door

where they throw water from the wash-bowls. Perhaps we can find their tracks still there.”

“Ann Mathers, you are a genius!” cried Jennie, rushing to the door. “Why haven’t we thought of that before? Let’s go now and see.”

The girls were all following her when Rhoda suggested that too many feet would be likely to trample out the footprints they were so anxious to find, so it was decided that Jennie, Flora, and Tilly should form a committee to investigate the matter. They soon came back, very much elated. “Hurrah!” shouted Jennie. “The battle’s over already.”

“Did you find them?” asked the waiting girls eagerly.

“Course we did. Big, splay-footed tracks all round the cellar door and in the path leading to the woods. We got Mrs. Johnson to look at them. The hateful princess wouldn’t come. She said she didn’t care who took ’em as long as they were gone, and some folks were as good as other folks in her opinion.”

“What did Mrs. Johnson say?” asked Rhoda.

“Oh, she looked ashamed. But she’s too mean to apologize. She only said she ‘knowed all the time it was them pesky Mud Creekites and Mirandy was a fool.’ ”

“What makes that beautiful princess so hateful to us?” asked May, wonderingly.

“The poor thing has a hard life and she feels bitter toward every one,” said Jennie, who could afford to be generous, since she had won the victory.

“I guess she’s got a mean, jealous disposition and don’t want to see any one happy,” remarked Jessie, shaking her wise little head.

“Yes, that’s it,” echoed Tilly, laughing.
“‘Dog in the manger.’ ”

“‘There’s no great loss without some small gain,’ ” said Lizzie with a sigh of relief, as she laid her curly head on a pillow. “We needn’t go back to that odious room again.”

“Odious!” repeated Minnie. “Why, I

thought it was lovely. I don't believe there is such rich furniture in Minnichute."

"The furniture is rich enough, but the colors! Why, it hurt me actually like a discord in music to look at that purple piano cover, bright blue carpet, green blinds, and the crimson furniture."

"Well, I didn't notice the furniture or coloring," said Jennie, "those gawky, pretentious fellows annoyed me so much."

"Why, I thought they were splendid!" exclaimed Minnie. "And that one they called Hi had an elegant mustache."

"'Every one to his fancy and me to my Nancy,' as the old woman said when she kissed her cow," said Jennie, laughing.

"I'm hungry, and I don't fancy being cheated out of my dinner by those miserable Hottentots," cried Fanny Jennings.

"What mean, sneaking things they must be," added her sister.

Mrs. Johnson changed her mind about dinner. She flew around, with the grudging help

of the princess, to prepare a substitute for the lost meal. A half dozen spring chickens met a sudden death. Mr. Johnson and the hired boy were pressed into service to prepare them for cooking, while biscuits and hastily concocted rice puddings with plenty of raisins were hurried into the ovens.

When the astonished girls walked into the dining-room about the middle of the afternoon and saw the excellent dinner on the table, they forgave the little woman on the spot for her unkindness.

"I'm sure this is a handsome apology," said Rhoda, smiling as she helped herself to a crisp, brown joint of chicken.

"There are the Low Downs," said Tilly, looking toward the door.

"I wonder what Mrs. Johnson will say to them. I wouldn't like to be in their shoes, if they had any," remarked Jessie.

The matter was soon settled. Mrs. Johnson met the crowd at the dining-room door with such a black look that the boldest of them

halted. "Clear out of here!" she cried. "I've got no dinner for thieves! The impudence of your coming here!" she went on, her voice growing shriller. "I've half a notion to send for the sheriff and have you all arrested. And I will, too, if I catch any of you in my cellar again!"

"Whose been in your sullen," said one of the largest girls. "We don't know nothin' about it."

"That's a pretty story to tell me, you lying sneaks! Go look at your ugly, barefooted tracks round the cellar door and don't come here with your brazen faces. Git out, I tell you!" she screamed, stepping toward them, "and don't let me see hide or hair of you again to-day!"

The box-tenders with them had turned back at first sight of Mrs. Johnson's face, and now the girls followed much more quickly than they had come. When the Minnichute party left the dining-room they saw a group of the Mud Creek girls talking loudly and angrily, with

many gestures and scowling looks in their direction.

“They are mad at us because they got found out, and I’m afraid they’ll hurt some of us in revenge,” said Kitty.

“Don’t be a coward, Kit,” cried Jennie. “We are as many in numbers as they, and I rather think we can defend ourselves if it comes to a pitched battle.”

“But perhaps they won’t give us a chance for a pitched battle,” remarked Tilly. “They are mean enough to do anything, and they will fight us as the Indians do, in ambush.”

“Why, girls, what *are* you talking about! The idea of making plans for a battle is shocking,” said Rhoda, earnestly. “What have we done to make them angry? If we let them alone they can’t possibly quarrel with us.”

“Nevertheless, they mean mischief. I feel it in my bones,” said Tilly.

“Well, we won’t talk about it any more,” said Rhoda, looking significantly at the round-

eyed youngsters, who were eagerly listening to the discussion.

So the subject was dropped and the girls went to their rooms. They spent a quiet Sunday evening, sitting on their beds, wrapped in shawls and each other's arms. They sang such hymns as they could remember in subdued tones, the moonbeams softening the barrenness of their dreary rooms and lighting up their fresh and youthful faces. No sound could be heard on the premises until the roll of wheels told them that the young men of the house were going away, and soon after, they knew by the usual patter of bare feet on the stairs and the usual racket overhead, that their mischievous neighbors were going to bed.

So, concluding that all danger for them was over for the present, at least, they were soon quietly sleeping away their first Sunday night as hop pickers. Their dreams would have been less peaceful if they had known that a regular assault upon them had been planned by the "Low Downs," and would have been carried

out with more or less effect if John had not interfered. He had been gone all day on a visit to his home, a dozen miles away, and only returned in time to prevent the mischief. He never told the Minnichute girls that he had fought and whipped Simmons, the only box-tender mean enough to enter into the plot, that he had threatened to inform the Johnsons and have all the "Low Downs" dismissed in the morning, or that he had stayed all night in the little sitting room to guard their door against surprise.

They only knew the next day that he was rather silent and sleepy, and he got many scoldings for his slowness from his tyrants, the small girls.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHINDIG

“GIRLS, there’s going to be a shindig tomorrow evening at Powell’s, about a mile from here, so John says. Let’s go.”

“What’s a shindig?” asked Ann, slowly unlacing her shoes. The girls were going to bed when Jennie made this announcement.

“Ann Mathers! have you been a hop picker for two mortal weeks and don’t know what a shindig is?”

“No, I don’t, so please tell me.”

“A hop pickers’ ball, of course. John says they come every Saturday night, and sometimes oftener. Every hop yard in a neighborhood is expected to have one and get up a fine supper, at least once during the season. He says they have lively times, and sometimes they break up in a row.”

“We don’t want to go to anything of that kind, of course. Don’t think of it, dear,” said Rhoda, anxiously.

“Oh, Rhoda, do let us go!” begged Jennie. “You know, John is a kind of guardian angel for us. He’ll take us over safely and back again. He says if we don’t like it we can leave at any time. This hop region is a little world by itself, and a shindig is one of its peculiar features. I’m so curious to see one.”

“Well,” said Rhoda, “I suppose John wouldn’t ask you to go if it wasn’t all right, and I don’t suppose it would do you any harm to look on for a little while. But do be careful and quiet, dear, and don’t stay very late.”

So it was arranged, and the next evening ten of the Minnichutes started out with John for the Powell hop yard. Jennie had not been able to induce Rhoda to go, and it had been thought best to keep the younger ones in ignorance of the expedition. So when they were in bed and asleep, the three Jennings, Jennie, Flora, Minnie, Nina, Ada, and the two Becketts arrayed

themselves as festively as possible, with old-fashioned flowers from the garden on their heads and at their throats. John knocked at their door at half-past seven and they started off with him in high spirits, while Rhoda, Nelly and Ann settled on Rhoda's bed for a quiet chat.

John and his party found a small house, lighted at every window, and heard the sound of squeaking fiddles and dancing feet.

"They've begun, that's a fact," said John. "I thought we'd be early. Well, you'll git enough of it, I reckon."

He knocked at the front door, and was invited in by their host, whom the girls thought the tallest man they had ever seen, with the most sheepish expression. "The dancin' is in the eatin' house," he said with a grin, as they all stood silently waiting his movements.

"Come on, girls!" said John, who evidently thought this all the invitation necessary to join in the festivities, and they passed through the house and entered a long, low shanty like the Johnsons' dining room.

The long tables were shoved against the wall, there they were used as seats by those who could not by any possibility squeeze into some "figure" on the floor. It was in the days when "round dancing" formed only part of the program. Four quadrilles were dancing with "might and main" to the music of three fiddles and one bass viol, while the Johnsons' "boss," with red face and streaming forehead, stood upon a chair in one corner of the room and "called off" in a loud roar which could be distinctly heard above the noisy din made by the dancing feet, the scuffling on the tables, and the laughing and talking everywhere.

The girls stood and watched the scene, confused by the sounds, and the wild whirl of the dancers as they brushed rudely against them in their vigorous response to "*All hands round,*" "*half promenade,*" "*balance all,*" "*swing yer pardners.*" When the cotillion was over there was a rush and tumult greater than ever, for those who had just left the floor were scrambling for good seats on the tables, and

those who wished to find places on the floor were crowding and pushing, for only the quickest and strongest couples had a chance to dance, and there was a good deal of quarreling for the best places.

The boss was flying round in great excitement, settling disputes and sending off disappointed couples, grumbling because they had lost their chance to dance and also their seats on the tables.

“Isn’t it dreadful!” cried May, in disgust. “Let’s go home.”

“Oh, not just yet,” said Jennie, who fancied John would be rather disappointed to leave so soon.

Just then he came up to say that he had seats for them where the air was better, and they could slip away easily when they were ready to leave. And leading the way, he pushed through the crowd, making a path for them. When they reached the door they found a long wash bench guarded by two Johnson box-tenders, who had some trouble in holding it.

“Here you be,” said John, cheerfully. “I found this bench out by the kitchen door and cabbaged it. It ain’t very nice, but it’ll be better than standin’.”

The girls were very tired of the standing and the jostling, and were very glad of the bench. While they were enjoying the comparative quiet and the fresh air, their Sunday acquaintances, Sim Johnson and his cousin, Hi, suddenly appeared before them. The girls had agreed to accept no invitations to dance, but Nina and Minnie walked off with the young men to scramble for places on the floor, ignoring the efforts of Jennie and Flora to hinder them.

“Don’t you see they have been drinking?” urged Jennie.

“I don’t care,” returned Minnie, excitedly. “I must dance just once.”

She soon came back, crying like a hurt child, and thoroughly frightened and subdued. Her hair was hanging about her face, her dress was torn, and in the surging crowd she had lost her partner, who had not been able to protect her.

Nina worked her way back to the bench very soon. She also had not been able to dance, and was quite willing to give up the attempt. The girls pinned together the rents in Minnie's gown, loaned her hair pins, and soothed her sobs.

"I wonder where John is," said Jennie. "The sooner we get away from here the better."

But John was not to be seen, and the girls concluded to wait a few minutes longer when a rush toward the door attracted their attention. Before they had time to be alarmed John came to them and said the crowd was going to the hop house to see the boss dance a jig while the tables were set for supper. He had promised to help Mrs. Powell, and after that would be ready to go home with them.

The girls were quite ready to wait for him as it was not late, and watched him help Mr. and Mrs. Powell draw the long tables to the middle of the floor. A dozen pairs of hands brought in the table cloths, the dishes and the food, and supper was called in a very short

time. Mrs. Powell was a pale, careworn woman who anxiously superintended everything, and turned gratefully to John, who had been flying around, placing chairs and benches, attending to the lights, and bringing in heavy trays of coffee, when he came to ask her if he should call the company.

They came with the same rush and scramble for places that there had been during the dancing, but as there was plenty of room for every one at the four long tables they were soon all seated and eating contentedly. It was a very bountiful meal. The dozen waiters were kept busy running back and forth with fresh cups of coffee, platters of cold ham and chicken, and hot biscuit. The plates and cups of those who finished first were at once taken away, so that the tables were almost cleared by the time the slower ones were through. They were moved to the wall by many willing hands, and the floor was cleared for dancing.

“Choose yer pardners for a waltz!” cried the boss.

“Hold on, Bill, let’s have a jig first,” called some one. “It’s too soon after supper for the whirlygigs.”

There was a general clapping of hands, and cries for Jack Munson. Several of the men caught the unwilling John and dragged him into the middle of the floor, while others pulled off his coat and shoes.

“Oh, git out, boys! I can’t dance to-night,” said John, trying to break away.

“He’s afraid his ‘Stuck Ups’ won’t like it,” said Nance Carter, sneeringly.

“He ain’t nuther,” angrily retorted one of John’s friends. “You shut up your ugly jaw!”

Nance began an angry reply, but John good-naturedly stopped them both by agreeing to dance, if they would fall back and leave him room.

When he was ready he motioned to the fiddlers, who began to play a lively jig, and John, in his stockinged feet and shirt-sleeves, commenced to dance. He was a slim, well-made fellow, and as his lithe legs and nimble feet

flew through the steps of an Irish jig his audience was very much delighted, and beat time rhythmically with clapping hands and stamping feet.

He danced a long time, as though he were wound up and couldn't stop. The people about him began to cheer wildly as they clapped and the Minnichute girls were wondering at his endurance, when suddenly, after a fantastic "pigeon-wing" he stopped and fell to the floor, his hand on his side and breathing heavily.

The girls were much frightened until the crowd around them parted and two men brought him on their shoulders to the bench. "I was afraid you'd be scared," he said, "so I made 'em bring me here. I'm all right now. It was only a stitch in my side that catches me sometimes. I hadn't ought to kep it up so long."

"Oh, I'm so glad it is nothing more serious," said Jennie. "But are you sure you are over it?"

"Well, it hangs on a little yet, but it'll soon be gone, I reckon. You ought to be goin'

home," he continued anxiously. "I don't think you want to see the round dancin'."

"Oh, don't worry about us," urged one of the girls. "You are not fit to walk home now, and we won't mind going alone."

"You mustn't do that," said John, emphatically. "Tain't safe."

"Why, who would hurt us?" cried Jennie.

"There are no highway robbers about, are there?" asked Tilly.

"No, but there's wild cats," said John, looking significantly at Nance Carter, who was scowling at them from her seat on a table.

"Oh, I understand," said Flora, "and I'm afraid of wild cats."

"I'm not!" exclaimed Jennie.

"Nor I," echoed Tilly.

"Well, I'm thinkin' you wouldn't like to be scratched by 'em more than once," said John. "You just wait here a minute till I git back," and walking slowly away, he was lost in the crowd.

The dancing was becoming more and more

boisterous and some of the girls were growing nervous, when some one saw him near the door beckoning them to follow him, and going out, they found a wagon arranged with seats like the one they had come to Johnson's in.

“Oh, John, we're making you so much trouble!” exclaimed some one.

“No, you ain't. Not a bit of it. I want to ride myself. Mis' Powell says we can have this team and welcome. So git right in.”

CHAPTER XII

THE STRIKE

ONE morning when the Minnichutes were working quietly at their boxes, they had a call from a delegation of "Low Downs." Since the cellar affair these girls had been as disagreeable as possible, crowding and pushing in the dining room when there was an opportunity, shouting insulting words in the hop yard whenever they were near enough to be heard, and often sending impudent messages to different ones in the Minnichute party. The latter felt safe under John's protection, and never replied in any way to words and messages. But they were somewhat startled when the "Low Downs" came upon them so suddenly, and felt sure they meant to insist upon a quarrel.

But to their relief, Nance Carter, who seemed

to be their leader, appeared quite amiable when she spoke to the girls at Rhoda's stand. "How's you'uns gittin' along?" she said, pulling a spray from Rhoda's pole and throwing a handful of hops in her box.

"Oh, we're doing nicely," returned Rhoda, pleasantly.

"Hops is good this year," continued Nance, after a pause. "Lot's better'n they was last, and old Johnson's got the best yard round here. Folks says he's gittin' rich. He's got a heap o' money in the bank."

"Indeed!" answered Rhoda. "I'm surprised at that, for he and his wife work as hard as though they had to."

"That's 'cause Mis' Johnson she wants to git all the money she can to 'cut a swath' with. They always beat down the price for pickin', and she wants to skinch their 'hands' just for meanness. But they ain't the only ones that's tryin' to git ahead of the pickers. They say over to Mosher's that the hop growers round here have bargained to sell their hops for sixty

and seventy cents a pound, and they only pay their pickers fifty cents a box, and the pickers ain't a-goin' to stand it. They was over here last night to git us into a big strike to-morrow, and they wanted me to ask you to jine in," said Nance, coming at last to the object of her visit.

"A strike!" exclaimed Rhoda. "Why, girls can't have strikes!"

"Yes, they can," replied Nance excitedly. "They had one two years ago over in Powell's neighborhood, and made the hop growers toe the mark, I can tell you. They had it just in the height of the season when the hops was all ripe and had to be picked right away. Everybody quit work till the growers agreed to raise the price for pickin'. 'Course they couldn't git nobody else on such a short notice and every day was worth hundreds of dollars to 'em, so they gave in to onct and that was the end of it."

"But we made a regular bargain to pick for fifty cents a box," said Rhoda. "It seems to me we are bound to stick to our agreement. I

don't see what excuse we can have for a strike."

"It don't make no difference what you think," said Nance impatiently. "It's allus understood that pickers is to have for a box what a pound of hops brings in the market, and they ain't agoin' to have their rights trampled on by no rich folks, neither."

"Well," answered Rhoda, quietly, "I don't think any of our party wish to join in anything of the kind. We are well treated and paid a good price for our work, and it would not be right to ask for more."

"Oh, ho! Miss Stuck-up!" cried Nance, with a red face and trembling with anger. "I s'pose you think it's fine to be puttin' on lady airs and lordin' round over other folks."

"What do you mean?" cried Jennie, angrily. She had just come to her sister's box to learn what was going on, and only heard Nance's last sentence.

"Don't say anything, dear," urged Rhoda, drawing Jennie one side to tell her the cause of the disturbance.

The ragged girls who had come with Nance here joined her in loud abuse of the whole Minichute party, but as they were not answered, they finally withdrew, railing as they went, while the other party clustered together, talking in indignant or frightened tones.

“Let’s tell Mrs. Johnson!” exclaimed Kitty.

“No, dear, I wouldn’t,” said Rhoda. “I’m sure it would do no good and would only get us into trouble. We would better go on quietly with our work as though nothing had happened.”

“Well, now, what shall we do if they come and make us stop work? That’s the way they do in regular strikes, isn’t it?” asked Tilly.

“Well, if they do that we’ll have to stop,” agreed Rhoda.

“But Rhoda,” exclaimed Jennie, excitedly, “it seems to me that would be cowardly. I don’t propose to have a lot of barbarians tell me what to do. If it’s right for us to pick hops I’m going to *pick*, and fight ’em if they try to interfere.”

“Oh, Jennie! It’s dreadful to hear you talk so. We can’t fight. It wouldn’t be doing wrong for us to stop work. If they insist upon it we’d better go to our rooms quietly and stay till the storm blows over.”

“But don’t you see, they won’t let us go to work again unless they win the day.”

“Well, we’ll see,” said Rhoda. “We needn’t worry now, at any rate, but act according to circumstances when the time comes.”

That night the “Low Downs” seemed more noisy than ever. The Minnichute girls could hear them talking loudly and moving about until a late hour. Nelly and Myra fastened the windows securely with nails they had found in the hop house, and straw beds were placed before the doors to prevent an invasion, which they had good reason to fear from the threats which had been heard in the afternoon.

But morning came and all was quiet. Few of the Minnichutes had slept well, and they felt rather tired and languid as they dressed by the feeble light of the candle.

At breakfast the "Low Downs" appeared as usual and the Minnichutes, concluding that the trouble was over, went to their places in the hop yard as usual. There they found the "Low Downs" and several box-tenders standing near their boxes in a way to prevent their reaching them, without pushing through the crowd.

"What shall we do?" cried Minnie, in alarm.

"*Do!*" returned Tilly. "I say we'd better get Mrs. Johnson to call the sheriff."

Nance Carter heard the word, sheriff, and saw Tilly's threatening gesture, and saying something in an undertone to the girls about her, started as though to attack the Minnichutes. But the box-tenders interfered and held them back, while John hurried up to the Minnichutes and, with real anxiety, begged them to go to their rooms.

"Them pesky hornets mean mischief, and no mistake," he said. "They're awful mad at you because you wouldn't jine 'em, so I'd git out o' their way for a spell."

The girls needed no second warning. They turned and walked rapidly back to the house, the younger ones crying and urging the others to run. But Rhoda would not allow that. "We mustn't let them see we are afraid," she said. "The box-tenders won't allow them to hurt us. Just keep quiet and cool, and everything will come out all right."

When they reached the house, Mrs. Johnson came to the door in great surprise, to see what was the matter. When the girls told her all they knew of the affair, her face flushed, but she only said, grimly: "Let 'em come on. I ain't afraid of 'em. Huldý!" she called to the little scullion who spent her life in washing dishes and paring potatoes, "you go to the hop house and tell Johnson to come here."

The obedient Huldý started off on a run, and the Minnichutes went to their rooms to wait for the battle with fear and trembling.

"Rhoda," said Jennie, after a moment of silence, "I'm going to the kitchen to stay with Mrs. Johnson. I don't believe that cowardly

husband will help her, and it isn't right to leave her alone. Who'll go with me?"

Four of the girls plucked up courage to join her, and though Rhoda thought it hardly wise, they started off with many entreaties from the others to be quiet and careful. They found Mrs. Johnson as composed as usual. She was putting pies into a large, brick oven, and seemed rather annoyed by the entrance of the girls, telling them they would better go back to their rooms. They couldn't help her and would probably be in her way.

But they begged her to let them stay, telling her they might be of some use, and they certainly wouldn't trouble her.

They were interrupted by the sound of many voices, and looking through the open door behind them, they saw a crowd of fifty or more pickers and box-tenders coming toward the house. Most of the "Low Downs" were there, and a number from other yards.

Mrs. Johnson went to the door as the crowd came near. "What are you here for?" she

demanded, as the nearest girls stood before her.

“Your pickers want better pay, and you’ll git no more pickin’ done till you agree to it,” said the leader.

Mrs. Johnson’s broad shoulders and arms akimbo filled up the doorway, hiding the girls behind her, as she said, coolly: “Well, you’ve come to the wrong place with yer threats. Our pickers won’t get but fifty cents a box, and if they don’t like that they may leave as soon as they please.”

This prompt and decisive statement rather staggered the leader. She fell back for consultation, but in an instant she returned and said in a threatening manner: “Well, ye needn’t to expect to git yer old hops picked. We won’t allow that. They’ll rot on the vines. Ye can bet on that.”

“Ye needn’t to worry about our hops. We can tend to our own business,” and then, suddenly losing her calmness, she ordered them off in a shrill voice, adding, “And if my pickers ain’t to work in five minutes they’ll be dis-

missed, and they won't get no dinner, either."

As the Johnson pickers were a good many miles from home this threat was a serious one, and an angry buzz arose from the crowd. There were so many of them, and the belief that the prospect of loss would make Mrs. Johnson come to their terms, as the other hop growers had done, had been so strong, that they were astonished at her prompt attitude of defiance and entirely at a loss as to what to do next.

Suddenly some one threw a lump of soft earth directly at Mrs. Johnson, hitting her on her cheek. She was furious with anger, and, darting into the kitchen, seized a large poker which she had been heating red hot in the glowing coals and made a rush for the throng. They took to their heels in a wild panic, shouting, swearing and tumbling over each other, and finally disappeared in the hop yard. The onslaught of the little woman with her dangerous weapon had been so sudden and furious that the strikers looked upon her as something superhuman. They were completely overwhelmed and routed,

and nothing would induce them to return to the charge, although Nance Carter taunted the box-tenders with cowardice and tried to make them rally for another attack.

It was useless. They slipped away in groups of twos and threes until only Nance Carter and a few of her sort were left. They soon saw that they could do nothing more and walked away very much chagrined. The strike was over and the strikers vanquished.

John went to the house and told the Minnichutes they might now return to the hop yard in safety. The beautiful Miranda unlocked her door and came out to help prepare the dinner under the direction of Mrs. Johnson, who moved about, pale and composed, but perfectly conscious of being mistress of the situation. Mr. Johnson cautiously peeped out of the hop house loft to see that the coast was clear and then came down to unlock the door. The Minnchute girls filed off to the hop yard and every one felt relieved that "War's alarms" were over.

CHAPTER XIII

THE RESCUE

THE Johnson farm was perhaps a quarter of a mile from a beautiful stream large enough to be called a river. The water was clear, and in one place there was a sandy bottom and shelving beach, which made a capital spot for swimming and bathing. It was well understood in the neighborhood that this place was for the use of women and girls only. Men had a "swimming hole" further down the stream where the banks were steeper and the water more swift.

A grove of tall pines grew between the Johnson place and the river and in these shaded woods the Minnechute girls were fond of walking on Sunday afternoons and other holidays.

One day about three o'clock the boss walked

about the yard telling every one to "knock off." The kilns could not take any more hops. So Rhoda and her sisters with a number of other girls quickly disposed of their sunbonnets, aprons and gloves, and started for a stroll in their favorite haunt. They were chatting and laughing as they walked about, arm and arm in the quiet warm air, when some one proposed that they should go to the swimming pool to see what was going on there. It was not far away. They could hear laughter and shouting and the splashing of water. The Low Downs were evidently enjoying a bath. The Minnechute party had never visited the pool as they felt sure they would not be welcomed by their hostile neighbors, who seemed to have appropriated it. But most of the village girls were fond of the water. Some of them could swim. Jennie especially had the reputation of swimming "like a duck." The temptation was strong to-day to "Just go and have a look at the place," as Tilly said.

"But John isn't here to defend us if the Low

Downs pitch into us," said the timid little Hattie.

"Oh, come on!" said Jennie. "I'm not afraid. We'll just look at the pool a few minutes and then walk on. They wouldn't dare touch us."

Rhoda hesitated, but as all the girls urged her to go with them, she yielded, and they found themselves in a few moments on the banks of the river watching a gay scene. Before them on the opposite side of the stream tall perpendicular bluffs rose straight from the water's edge. Behind them were the dark pines. The pool was very secluded, seeming to be guarded on all sides by steep walls. A dozen or more bare-armed, bare-legged girls were wading and swimming about in the water. They were dressed in short cotton gowns of many colors, and none of them wore stockings. Some had straggling wet locks hanging about their faces while the heads of others were covered with towels or large red handkerchiefs, to keep the hair dry.

On the bank were seated, and moving about,

another dozen women and girls, some of them dressed to go in the water or entering little dressing tents made by tying sheets to bushes, where they took off their wet bathing suits, which they afterward hung to dry on a clothes-line stretched between two trees.

The hazy September sun looked down on the bright-moving mass of color, making a charming picture. Jennie was quite carried away by it. "Oh, how lovely!" she cried. "And how perfectly grand it must be to be in there. I wish I had a bathing suit. I'd love to dive from that pier. They say the water is eight feet deep there."

"Why, where did you learn to dive," cried Tilly. "I never heard of a girl doing that. I thought it was only a boy's trick."

"Uncle Dick taught Rhoda and me to swim and me to dive one summer when we visited him. He lives on the shore of Lake Michigan. He's an old sailor, you know."

"Wish I had an Uncle Dick," remarked Tilly rather enviously.

“The water must be rather cold in spite of the warm air,” remarked Rhoda. “They say it comes from springs.”

“You would think it was cold to look at those girls!” said Tilly, laughing and pointing toward a couple who had just entered the stream and who stood shivering, with their teeth chattering, although the water reached only to their ankles.

“That’s no way to do,” said Jennie impatiently. “They’d warm up in a minute if they’d plunge right in and swim out like those girls at the pier. They’re having a splendid time.”

The pier was a very narrow one, built of rough boards and extending perhaps ten feet into the stream. At the end of it were fastened two boats, around which a number of long-haired mermaids were swimming, clutching at each other and shouting and laughing wildly. The party on the bank which had been so gay and lively when the Minnechute girls arrived were now gathered in groups, whispering, and

nodding and sending scowling looks toward the newcomers.

"The water isn't the only cold thing here," remarked Myra, shrugging her shoulders.

"Everybody seems to hate us wherever we go. I don't see what we've done," said Jessie plaintively.

"Never mind. We won't stay long," said Rhoda, with her hand on the little girl's shoulder.

"The Low Downs are at the bottom of this, I suspect," said Flora.

"There's no sense in their acting so," remarked Jennie decidedly.

"I'm going to see if I can't break the ice a little."

She walked out toward the pier with her hands in the pockets of her jacket and called out cheerily. "Girls, why don't you dive from the pier?"

"We ain't boys and we ain't ducks," cried one of the swimmers.

“This is good enough for us,” said another.

“But you don’t know what fun it is! Ever so much better than swimming,” protested Jennie.

“If yer so smart why don’t ye come on and do it yerself,” replied a mocking voice.

There was a general laugh, and Jennie said in a chafed tone, “How can I take a dare like that, Rhoda?”

But in an instant, before her sister could reply, she saw that she must take the dare at once, not to show what she could do, but to try to save a life. Before she had finished speaking, she had seen one of the swimmers throw up her arms as she gave a loud cry, and then sink instantly out of sight. “Cramps!” cried Jennie tearing off her jacket, and beginning to unlace her shoes.

“What are you going to do,” cried Flora in consternation.

“Going to dive for her, of course! Stand out of my way!” she shouted as shoes and garments flew in all directions.

“Oh, Rhoda, do you think she ought to?” asked Kitty, sobbing and throwing her arms around her older sister.

“Yes, of course,” cried Rhoda pushing the child away. “Don’t be a coward, dear. Help, don’t hinder,” and running to the clothes line she took it down in a twinkling, letting the clothes drop to the ground, and while she quickly and deftly wound the rope into a coil and slung it over her arm she gave orders in loud ringing tones which could be heard above the din and confusion about her. The swimmers had all come to the shore and stood huddled together with scared faces. Some of them were crying hysterically, others fainted, they were all talking together, but no one had a suggestion to make; every one was in a panic.

“Who can row a boat?” demanded Rhoda, turning to her party.

“I can,” and “I,” answered May and Tilly.

“You two run out on the pier and unloose one of the boats. Ann, please take the little girls home. Flora, you’re a fast runner, get some

one here with a doctor as soon as you can. Everybody stop crying! Keep still!" commanded Rhoda loudly, her arm raised high in the air. "This girl will be saved if we can get her on land in time," she went on. "You must all be quiet now, and keep your wits about you so that you will be ready to help."

It did not seem possible to the amazed Minnchute party that this tall, alert figure, with the blazing eyes, was their gentle quiet Rhoda. The terrified crowds were silent at once as though a spell had been put upon them and turned eager and expectant faces toward Rhoda, who continued with her air of a general.

"You're from Powells', aren't you?"

"Yes," replied all of them at once.

"Some of you, the fastest runners must go to the house and give the alarm. Tell Mr. Powell to come with a wagon and bring blankets, camphor, brandy, hot water in bottles, and a barrel. Don't forget any of them, and hurry!"

The last order was given over her shoulder, for she was now running down the shaky pier,

close behind came Jennie who was stripped to her underclothing and stockings.

The sisters made a hasty agreement that Jennie should dive from the boat, as near as possible to the spot where they had seen the unfortunate girl go under the water.

May and Tilly had flown down the pier at Rhoda's command and had been trying to loosen one boat from its moorings. No one knew anything about a key, to unlock the rusty padlock, and the girls soon decided that they must try to pull up the staple which held the chain and which was fastened securely to the plank. Fortunately for them the wood of the pier was old and decaying so there seemed some hope of getting the staple loose. It had begun to give with repeated wrenchings. Tilly pulled wildly at the obstinate chain. Her hands were blistered and bleeding, but she was too excited to think of that. May had also pulled with all her might with her hands wrapped in a handkerchief. The end of the pier was now filled with the excited Powell pickers, who looked helplessly

at the rusty chain which refused to budge in spite of the frantic efforts of the girls. Their united strength was not enough. The staple still held fast.

“Why don’t some of you mutton heads come and help us!” cried Tilly, angrily. “Don’t you see we’ve got to yank the thing out? We two can’t do it alone. I should think you might do that much.”

Three or four of the girls sprang forward at her words, and by one vigorous pull, all together, loosened the staple and the boat was free. It was done so quickly that Tilly had no time to brace herself and fell over backward into the water. She was a good swimmer and very quick in her movements, and in an instant had clambered into the boat. Rhoda had jumped into it the moment she reached it, and while the staple had been pulled out, she had fitted the oars to their sockets, so that there was no further time lost. May took one oar, and Tilly the other, Rhoda sat in the stern, and they pulled quickly out to Jennie, who was swimming

about "to get limbered up," she said. "If any of you can handle oars come with the other boat, and bring along one or two sheets," called Rhoda to the girls left behind.

They were glad to be of some use, and were soon on the water with the second boat, two big strong girls at the oars, and a third in the stern. As they came up to Rhoda she told them to hold her boat steady, as Jennie was getting ready to dive from the bow.

They were now, at least a hundred feet from the shore, where the water was quite deep and the current strong so that the boats were paddled round in circles to keep them from drifting down stream.

The first attempts of the young diver were not successful. She explored the bottom of the river again and again each time coming up choking and breathless, but was soon able to make another plunge. When this had been repeated until they were sure they would not find the body where it had sunk, they concluded too look for it further down the stream, guess-

ing that the current had carried it along. This surmise proved to be true, for at last Jennie rose to the surface exclaiming: "I've found her. She's lying almost under the boats!"

"How are you going to get her up?" asked Tilly breathlessly.

"I could bring her to the surface easily if I wasn't so tired," said Jennie panting heavily.

"I was afraid of that," said Rhoda quietly as she began to tear a sheet into halves. "You mustn't do more than hold on to her clothing while we pull you up," she went on to her sister, while she fastened one-half of the sheet firmly round her waist. She then tied the clothes line to this band in the back, and the brave young rescuer sprang into the water again, the rope in the hands of the others paying out rapidly as she sank. The water was deep. They were beginning to fear that the line would not prove long enough, when at last they felt the jerk which told them it was time to pull in. This was an easy task, as yard after yard of the wet rope was hauled quickly into the boat, until the

two heads appeared above the water. For an instant Rhoda was dismayed. How were they to lift that great unconscious body into the boat without over turning it. But the Powell pickers were now very alert and were as strong as men. Some of them held on to the side of the first boat to steady it, while others caught hold of the drowning girl by her hair and clothing, and succeeded in lifting her great form into the first boat, while Rhoda, May and Tilly, helped the exhausted Jennie into the other one and all were rowed swiftly to land. Mr. Johnson had just come with a carriage and two box-tenders, and by the time the landing was made, the Powell horses came galloping up with a wagon filled with men and women, bringing the supplies Rhoda's forethought had provided. Mr. Johnson reported that he had sent a man on a swift horse for the only doctor within reach. He might not be able to get there within an hour and the question arose at once "what shall we do for the drowning girl, and who will take charge of the case?" The girl had been in the

water at least twenty minutes and if she was to be saved not an instant was to be lost. Rhoda looked about and, seeing everybody hesitate, she said at once: "I've seen my uncle bring back life to a drowning person. I'm willing to try."

"Yes, you're the one. Go ahead. I bet you can save her if any body can," came in a chorus from the Powell pickers.

"Well then, two of the strongest young men come and help me lift her over this barrel," said Rhoda. "Everybody else stand back and keep still. Let the men be ready to take the place of the first two when they get tired."

Her calmness and air of confidence made them all believe in her, and hasten to obey her orders. "Some one take Jennie, May and Tilly home, and get them in dry clothes," she directed, and then told the men how to roll the barrel vigorously to expel the water from the lungs of the girl who was placed face down upon it. The patient was then laid upon the ground and the process of artificial respiration begun. She was

a large vigorous young woman with big strong lungs, and yet she did not, for a long time, respond to the treatment. The men "took turns" and all worked faithfully, lifting her great arms above her head and then down to her sides regularly, like the action of a wind-mill or a pump. The half hours passed and still she lay like one dead. The workers were almost discouraged. It seemed a useless task to try to bring her to life. They would have given up, if Rhoda had not urged them to continue the treatment, at least until the doctor got there.

Her finger was on the pulse, and her ear over the heart of the patient, when she was at last rewarded by the first sign of life, a faint flutter of the eyelids, a distressed moan from the blue lips, and a convulsive shudder of the big body. The silent terrified crowd broke into cheers and handshakings and hysterical crying. Molly Calligan, the sister of the patient, now fell on her knees by Rhoda's side sobbing and wringing her hands.

“Oh, ye are a saint from heaven,” she cried. “Me father and mother and all of us will bless ye as long as ye live. And we was so mean to ye! We ain’t fit to have ye wipe yer old dirty shoes on us.”

“Oh, don’t!” said Rhoda in a distressed voice as she still leaned over her patient.

“Here comes the doctor!” called some one, as a light carriage drove rapidly to the spot.

A short, fat man jumped to the ground, and ran to the group around the still unconscious girl.

“Tend to her first, doctor,” cried a box-tender, pointing to Rhoda, whose relaxed arms had fallen to her side while her eyes had closed.

“She’s goin’ to die! Oh! We’ve killed her!” screamed Molly Calligan as they all looked at Rhoda’s pale, exhausted face.

“No,” said Rhoda, smiling faintly and rising to her feet. “I’m only pretty tired. I hope we have done the right thing, doctor.”

“How long had she been in the water?” he asked briefly.

When she told him, and also their methods of resuscitation, he said heartily, "You've left little for me to do, ma'm. Your intelligent treatment and promptness has saved her life. It was a close call. But you look worn out. You'd better go home now and rest. I'll finish the job."

Two stalwart box-tenders insisted on carrying her to the carriage on an improvised chair, although she protested that she was quite able to walk. There were a hundred people there by this time as the news of the drowning had traveled fast. The men took off their hats, and the women said prayers aloud as she passed through their ranks, and the sobs and blessings of the friends of the rescued girl were ringing in her ears as she drove away with her head on the shoulder of Lizzie Becket.

CHAPTER XIV

A RAINY DAY

THE hop growers had been favored since the opening of the season with beautiful, dry weather, so that for the first two weeks there had been no delay in harvesting the large crops. But at last there came a change. One day the sky was overcast, and the next morning rain began to fall steadily before any one was stirring.

John had told his pickers not to come out if it rained, so when they heard the patter on the windows, many of the girls dropped their heads on their pillows again for the luxury of another morning nap. They could do this with much peace of mind as Mrs. Johnson sent word by little Huldy that breakfast would be an hour late that morning.

Ever since Mrs. Johnson had found out who

the Minnichutes were, their condition had gradually improved. First, curtains were hung over the windows. Then a stand with a lamp took the place of the broken-backed chair and the candle. Mirrors, wash-bowls and pitchers, with plenty of clean towels next made their appearance, and the grateful girls felt themselves almost civilized again. After the strike Mrs. Johnson took great pains to show them favors in the presence and hearing of the Mud Creekites, who were now quiet and sullen and never spoke to them. The Minnichutes were called to their meals before the others and given the best places at the tables and had extras in the way of dessert, and as a crowning mark of favor they were invited to use the parlor and piano whenever they chose. They had not taken advantage of this privilege except on Sundays, because after the long day in the open air they were too tired and sleepy to dress for evening, and generally went to bed soon after supper.

But with all the improvements, their rooms were not comfortable enough to make a rainy

day in them attractive, and after breakfast they were glad to accept Mrs. Johnson's standing invitation, and moved in a body to the parlor. A bright fire was burning in the open grate and the piano stood invitingly open, when they entered the room.

"How perfectly glorious!" exclaimed Jennie, dancing around with her arms flying.

"I thought a rainy day would be awfully poky," said little Hattie, "but I believe we can have more fun here than picking hops."

"I wonder if Mrs. Johnson will let us pop corn over these coals," said a little girl, sitting down on the floor before the fire.

"She'll let us do anything," replied Jessie, promptly. "I'm going to ask her for the popper and some corn."

Kitty went with her, and Jennie said: "Let's have some music before the popping begins."

May was placed on the piano stool by a dozen hands and began to run her fingers over the keys. "What shall we sing?" she asked.

"College songs," replied Tilly, promptly.

The Becket girls knew a dozen or more of these which their brother Ned was always singing at home. May or Lizzie sang the verses, the other girls soon learning and joining in the rollicking choruses. They were enjoying themselves prodigiously when they were interrupted by the return of the little girls, who burst into the room, Hattie exclaiming shrilly: "Oh, girls, what do you think! When we came back with the popper just now we saw a lot of the 'Low Downs' with shawls over their heads, crouching in the rain under the windows of the parlor. What do you s'pose they were there for? Did they mean to hurt us?"

"Hurt us!" echoed Jennie. "No, of course not. The poor things were trying to hear our music."

"Crumbs from the rich man's table," quoted Ann, but no one heard her, and Nora said as she came forward from her corner on the sofa, "Why don't they come in and listen like respectable people?"

"Do you suppose Mrs. Johnson would allow

them to come into this sacred room!" exclaimed Jennie. "'Course she wouldn't. We're the chosen people and they're the outcasts."

"Oh, what nonsense!" cried Ada, impatiently. "If they'd be clean and decent Mrs. Johnson would treat them as she does us."

"But I don't believe they know how to be decent," said Kitty, taking up the discussion. "Their folks are poor and ignorant, and haven't taught them anything."

"Why should they be blamed for what they can't help?" said Jessie, adding her mite to the argument.

"Do you think everybody ought to be treated alike and have the same privileges?" asked Minnie.

"Yes, why not?" asked Jennie, defiantly.

"Then there wouldn't be any servants," put in Myra. "We would have to wait on ourselves."

"And if we had servants we'd have to invite them to our parties, and they would sit at the table with us," said Nina.

“I think it’s perfectly right to have upper and lower classes,” said Ada, decidedly. “There wouldn’t be any society if people weren’t divided that way.”

“I think so too,” said Nina, “and we all ought to think so, for that is taught in the Bible.”

“The Bible!” cried Tilly. “How do you make that out?”

“‘Servants, obey your masters in the Lord,’ ” quoted Nina, triumphantly.

“But the Bible says: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,’ ” cried Jennie eagerly. “You can’t get round that.”

“Well, if you want your brother to marry the washwoman, you may. *I* don’t,” said Nina, as a final “clincher.”

Rhoda sat before the fire in a little rocker during this lively discussion. Her placid face wore an expression of gentle amusement as she listened, while she stroked the fur of a little kitten in her lap, and she laughed with the others at Nina’s logical closing of the argument.

“And now,” she said, when her voice could

be heard. "Since we have settled this important question, let us have some more music."

The girls agreed, and after much urging, Ada took her seat on the piano stool and began to play a march loudly, to drown the noise of the corn popping which was now going on. In a moment or two Rhoda put the kitten on the floor, and stepped quietly to the porch, and onto the grass. As she expected, a dozen or more of the Mud Creek girls were hovering in the rain as near the windows of the parlor as they could get without being seen from within. Before they were aware of her presence she was among them, saying kindly: "Won't you come in, girls? We'd like to have you sit with us and listen to the music."

They were taken completely by surprise, and burst into giggles and smothered cries as they vanished round the corner of the house, all except one child about Kitty's age, who stumbled and fell, cutting her bare, red, little foot on a piece of glass which lay in her path.

She was very much frightened and began to

scream, more with terror than pain, as she saw the blood running from the wound. Rhoda lifted her to a seat on the edge of the porch, and wrapped her handkerchief round the injured foot. The Minnichute girls heard the cries, and came swarming out to see what was the matter. They crowded round the group, asking questions and adding a good deal to the noise and confusion. Rhoda told them of the accident and then sent them back, saying to the little girl, soothingly: "Now I'm going to take you in where we can get some water to bathe your poor foot, and then when we put a nice, clean cloth around it I'm sure you'll feel better."

The child kept on sobbing, but she did not draw away when Rhoda put her arm around her and led her limping indoors. Mrs. Johnson looked rather glum and unsympathetic, but she directed Rhoda to a back shed where they found water, and soon after, Huldý came to bring a roll of soft, old, cotton cloth and a bottle of opodeldoc.

Rhoda sat on the floor, the little girl on a stool before her, and with skilful fingers dressed the wound, all the time talking cheerfully to her small patient whose crying gradually stopped, as she watched the operation. "You like music, don't you?" asked Rhoda, smiling up into the child's face.

"*I* do," said Huldy, who was acting as surgeon's assistant. "Wisht I could hear them girls play the pianner."

"Wouldn't Mrs. Johnson allow you to go in the parlor to listen for a little while?" asked Rhoda.

"Not if *I* ast her. She might if you would," replied Huldy eagerly.

"Well, I'll ask her, and would you like to go, too?" she asked, turning to the other child, who was too bashful to speak and answered by nodding shyly, while her large, black eyes shone excitedly.

The foot was bandaged neatly now, and the young surgeon rose, saying: "Will you run, Huldy, and tell this little girl's friends that she

is better and will stay with me for a while. When you come back we'll go and see Mrs. Johnson about you."

Huldy darted away on her errand and was back again in a few seconds, almost breathless, and together the three went to the kitchen where they found Mrs. Johnson as busy as usual. She was not as amiable as her little handmaid had hoped. She said grumbly, that Huldy was a "regular little shirk" and didn't "earn her salt." She had to be watched every minute to get anything out of her, and she was needed especially then to help prepare vegetables for dinner. She couldn't think of allowing her to go to the parlor.

Rhoda did not give up, however, and by dint of a little tactful persuasion, she made a compromise. Huldy was allowed to sit by the parlor door with a pan of potatoes in her lap, which she promised to peel diligently while she listened to the music.

Half lifting the lame child into the parlor, Rhoda returned to her place by the fire and

took her charge onto her lap, saying: "I've promised this little girl some music. Some one please play for her. Leave the door open, Kitty, so that Huldry can hear. She's just outside with her work."

"Well! It takes Rhoda to do things," exclaimed Tilly. "Here we sit and argue till the air is blue. Rhoda says nothing, but she *acts*."

Jessie offered some popcorn to the newcomer with a hospitable smile, and Jennie laid a hand on her black, curly head, saying: "Isn't she cunning? And how pretty she is! She's quite clean, too," she added, noticing the thin, faded calico gown.

"You wouldn't talk like that before her if she were the President's daughter, would you?" asked Rhoda, smiling.

"I thought you believed all people should be treated alike," said Nina, derisively.

"Theory and practice can't always be made to fit together," said Lizzie, putting her arm around Jennie's waist.

“Consistency is a jewel,” quoted Myra, joining the group.

“Oh, I own up!” cried Jennie, explosively. “Pitch into me, all of you. I am as much of a snob as any one. I might as well confess that I can’t think of some people as really human, and this little thing seems to me only a strayed kitten.”

“Oh, Jennie Dill, you’re really ever so much worse than any of us. You can’t preach to us any more,” cried Minnie.

“Hush, girls!” warned Rhoda. “We have a dear, bright, little creature for our guest. You don’t know how much of your talk is understood.”

“What’s her name?” asked Hattie, staring at the little guest as she offered her the popcorn again.

“I don’t know. Won’t you tell me, dear?” asked Rhoda, gently.

The child had not raised her eyes from the floor since she came into the room, and sat very still on Rhoda’s lap as though afraid to move.

She had not spoken a word, but when she was asked for her name, she whispered it very faintly.

“Did you say Matey?” asked Rhoda, who was not sure she had heard aright.

The child nodded “yes,” and Rhoda said pleasantly: “What a pretty name! I like it very much.”

“Sister, would you tell the President’s daughter when you first met her that you thought her name a pretty one?” asked Jennie, slyly.

“Was I condescending?” asked Rhoda, joining in the laugh that followed, and Tilly, remarking that she guessed “odds were even” all round now, began to play “Yankee Doodle” for the benefit of the “strayed kitten,” and the little scullion peeling potatoes by the door.

CHAPTER XV

THE HOP PICKER'S SONG

THEY were in the parlor again one afternoon. It was not a rainy day, but there was a cold and disagreeable wind out-of-doors, which made the warm, quiet parlor seem very cozy. The girls were having a very unexpected holiday. Word had been passed around in the yard soon after dinner that the drying kilns could not keep pace with the amount of hops on hand, so all picking would have to stop for half a day.

The little girls decided to stay in the yard for a frolic among the vines, and to go with John later to see the operation of pressing and baling hops for the market. The older girls, dressed in the clothes they wore on Sundays, looked very comfortable and domestic, clustered in groups about the large room. There

was a good deal of singing and piano playing, while some of the thrifty girls were busy with thimbles and needles, glad of a chance to do a little necessary mending.

“Here’s the mail, girls!” cried Tilly, bounding into the room with a bundle under her arm.

There were shrieks of joy and a general scramble as the letters were sorted, and then a silence fell as, with absorbed faces and little exclamations of surprise or pleasure, the home news was read.

“You look happy!” said Rhoda, glancing at Flora’s beaming face.

“I’ve reason to. Papa writes that Aunt Lizzie came very unexpectedly to make a visit. She’s going to stay with Papa and the children while Mama goes off for a vacation. That takes a load off my mind. She needed a change more than I did.”

Rhoda was reading a letter which seemed to interest her very much. She flushed and smiled, and then said as she handed the letter to Jennie: “This is for you, too, dear.”

“Who can be writing to us from Ballymore!” exclaimed Jennie examining the postmark. “W. R. Mitchell,” she went on reading the signature. “I never heard of him before.”

“The best way to find out who wrote your letter is to read it,” said Myra, laughing.

“Why! It’s from the Calligans’ priest!” exclaimed Jennie after reading a few lines. “And he’s said all kinds of nice things to us about saving that girl’s life. It seems the Calligans can’t write, and have been waiting for their priest to come round and write for them.”

“I thought it was queer that you never heard a word from that girl’s parents,” Fanny remarked.

“Or from any body else, for that matter,” grumbled Nora.

“Nobody seems to think Rhoda and Jennie did anything remarkable in saving a drowning girl. You never hear any one speak of that awful day any more than as if it hadn’t happened.”

“That’s the way with country people,” said

Rhoda. "They usually are silent about such matters. But I have no doubt they talk among themselves."

"Yes, that's what John says," said Nelly. "He told us they talked about nothing else in all the hop yards. They seem to think the Dill girls belong to a superior order of beings."

"I'm glad they don't tell us that," said Jennie. "We wouldn't know how to hide our blushes, would we, Rhoda?"

"We don't deserve all the praise," said Rhoda. "We couldn't have done anything without Tilly, May and Flora."

"Oh, what nonsense!" protested May. "We really did nothing that any one there would not have done. Every one knows you two are the real heroines."

"What *are* those box-tenders doing?" exclaimed Minnie, calling every one's attention to the window.

Two young men, carrying some heavy planks on their shoulders, were coming toward the house, and finally stopped before the parlor

windows where they arranged some rude seats against the side of the house by placing flat stones under the ends of the boards.

“Those are for our audience,” said Myra. “They’re tired of standing, or sitting on the ground, and they’re going to make themselves comfortable.”

“Isn’t it queer that they won’t come in?” said Nelly. “We’ve almost begged them to, you know.”

“I’ve given that up,” said Rhoda. “They seem to like us better at a distance. They vanish every time I try to scrape acquaintance with them. Even little Matey runs away when I speak to her. Yet I know she likes me, for she often sends me little bunches of asters and golden rod by the box-tenders.”

“I believe they feel friendly to us now,” remarked Nelly. “Have you noticed that some of them say ‘good morning’ when they pass us? They are as quiet as mice in their room, and now they wear stockings and shoes and are quite clean and respectable.”

“John says it’s all our doings,” remarked Nora. “He says he never saw such a change.”

“It’s no one’s doings but Rhoda’s and Jennie’s,” cried Tilly, stoutly. “They conquered the barbarians by bringing one of them to life, and then you know Rhoda played good Samaritan to the strayed kitten.”

“John told me he thought it was the music more than anything else,” remarked Ann, in her slow, guttural voice.

“Well, at any rate, they don’t look like the same creatures,” remarked Fanny. “Isn’t it queer how we’ve all stopped calling them the ‘Low Downs’?”

“There they come,” cried Nina, as a procession of Mud Creek girls, wrapped in shawls and cloaks, came in sight, and silently took their seats on the benches.

“Don’t look at them or they will run!” warned Rhoda. “Somebody play something lively!”

While Tilly reeled off waltzes and mazurkas,

Flora found a seat on a sofa at the end of the room, and Jennie, sitting beside her, began darning a stocking.

"We never have a minute alone together," complained Flora.

"No," agreed Jennie. "A hop yard is not a good place for bosom friends to exchange secrets in."

"We might as well be miles apart," said Flora.

"Oh, no, not so bad as that," said Jennie cheerfully. "We see each other every minute. We have lots of fun, and we're getting rich in the bargain."

"How much will you have when we're through?" asked Flora.

"Forty-five dollars I expect. If I hadn't been frivolous it would have been sixty. Rhoda will earn that much. Isn't that riches?"

"You'll make more than I will," said Flora. "I was reckoning a little to-day, and if I don't do better than I have, I'll only take home thirty-five dollars."

“Oh, that’s too bad!” cried Jennie, sympathizingly. “I’m sure that’s because you haven’t got your strength back since your sickness, and you can’t work like the rest of us.”

“You’ll have most enough to go to Chicago this fall, won’t you?” said Flora.

Jennie looked around to see that no one was listening before she answered. “I haven’t had a chance to tell you, Flo, what we are planning. My family say I must go to the city this fall to study. We saved twenty-five dollars from my school wages. Rhoda and Kitty insist on putting their hop money with mine, and to-day Father’s letter says that he has just collected an old debt and can help out. So I suppose it’s settled. Now, isn’t there any way for you to go, too?”

“I can’t see any way,” said Flora, mournfully. “There isn’t any one to help me.”

“I can’t tell you how bad that makes me feel,” said Jennie, letting her stocking drop from her hands. “I can’t bear to go without you.” And then, brightening, she added: “But

perhaps something will turn up after all. Let's not give it up."

"Jennie, why don't you sing 'Upidee' with us?" called Tilly.

"Too busy telling secrets to my bosomest," said Jennie, darning busily.

"But we need your big voice. Can't you stop talking long enough to join in the chorus?"

"I'm tired of college songs," said Myra, leaving the piano. "We're singing them from morning to night in the hop yard."

"Why can't we have a hop picker's song?" asked one of the girls.

"Who's musician enough to write one?" asked Rhoda.

"We might take a tune we know and fit some words to it," suggested Lizzie.

"That sounds feasible," remarked Rhoda. "Who is our poet?"

"Flora!" answered Jennie, promptly. "She writes lovely verses."

"No, I don't," said Flora, blushing and smiling. "I can't do anything but doggerel."

“Doggerel’s good enough for us. You can do it if you try. Get her pencil and paper.”

“Do, please, Flora, won’t you?” urged the girls, flocking around her.

“Well, I’ll try. But we’ll have to decide on the tune first,” said Flora, looking very animated.

“Don’t take a college song,” warned Myra.

“How would ‘The Last Rose of Summer’ do?” asked Lizzie.

“Too slow and mournful. Let’s have something unusual but gay,” said Jennie, decidedly.

“May, you must know just what we want,” said Tilly.

“‘Vive la Compagnie’ would do, wouldn’t it, sister?” suggested Lizzie.

“But we can’t sing in French,” objected Tilly.

“The words might be English, and you could learn the French chorus easily,” urged Lizzie.

“It’s very pretty.”

“Let’s hear it,” said several girls together.

The Becket sisters sang the little, convivial

French ditty, and as Lizzie had predicted, the whole party were soon joining strongly in the chorus, very much charmed with the musical foreign song.

“Now, Flo, put on your thinking cap, and let’s have some words that mean something,” exclaimed Tilly, briskly.

They allowed the young poet to go to their deserted room, where she would be entirely alone while she “courted the Muse,” as May put it. She had a nimble mind, and was very quick at tasks of this sort. Some time before supper she had composed a parody on the little French song, and brought it to May to sing while the other girls joined in the chorus.

“A gay, merry set of hop pickers we are,
Vive la compagnie!

We come from near and we come from afar
Vive la compagnie!

CHORUS:

Vive la, vive la, vive la vous
Vive la, vive la, vive la vous
Vive la vous, vive la vous
Vive la compagnie!

THE HOP PICKERS

From Mud Creek and Atwood and Minnichute too

Vive la compagnie!

We work and we play, as hop pickers do

Vive la compagnie! (Chorus)

There's Rhoda and Minnie and Lizzie and May

Vive la compagnie!

There's Kitty and Jessie and tall Ada Fay

Vive la compagnie! (Chorus)

And Myra and Jennie and all of the rest

Vive la compagnie!

Though little and big, we all do our best

Vive la compagnie! (Chorus)

Hurrah for O. Johnson, three cheers for his wife

Vive la compagnie!

Peace, comfort and pleasure be theirs all their life

Vive la compagnie!" (Chorus)

"Why, how pretty!" exclaimed Rhoda, warmly. "It's really very nice and smooth."

"Of course! What did I tell you?" cried Jennie, proudly. "Flora'll have a great name some day."

"Does it always make your cheeks red and your hands cold to write poetry?" asked the observant Kitty, who had come in with the

other little girls and now stood with her arm round the waist of the young poet.

"Yes, always. I wish it wouldn't," said Flora, looking for a seat.

"If I was going to write a poem I'd lay a wet towel on my head and put some mittens on before I began," remarked little Hattie.

"I don't think the song's long enough," said Jessie. "I wish you'd put in a verse about John."

"That would make the other box-tenders jealous," remarked May.

"I wanted to get the box-tenders in, but I couldn't think of a rhyme," said Flora. "I tried a long time and then had to give it up."

"It seems too bad to leave them out when they do so much for us," remarked Jennie.

"Well, suppose some of you try," suggested Flora, pressing her cold hands on her burning cheeks.

They were all silent for a moment. Flora's rhymes sounded so simple and easy it seemed as though any one could write them with a little

thought. After a while Jessie remarked plaintively, "I can think of plenty of things to say, but the words won't jingle together as Flora makes 'em."

"How would this do?" cried Tilly, jumping up and speaking excitedly.

"We pick and we sing from morning till night
And then, for a change, the box-tenders fight."

They all laughed, and Rhoda said protestingly: "Oh, no! We must say something nice about them or—"

"What's a good rhyme for poles," interrupted Flora, her brows knitted and her pencil twisting nervously in her fingers.

"Bowls," "coals," "doles," "foals," "goals," "holes," "souls," suggested the different ones in the group about her.

"Stop!" cried Flora, at the last word. "I've got it. Keep still a minute, please."

They watched her silently while she scribbled and erased, and then read aloud:

“Here’s a cheer for the strong men who bring us our poles

Vive la compagnie!

We couldn’t be pickers without the good souls

Vive la compagnie!” (Chorus)

The girls clapped their hands, and Rhoda said that would do very well.

“It’s just perfect!” cried the ardent Jennie, hugging her friend. “Flo, I’m proud of you.”

“Flora might have got all our names in,” said Nina, rather sulkily.

“I tried to,” said Flora, quickly, “but I thought it would make the song too long. So I just took the ones that jingled together, as Jessie says.”

“Flora didn’t put her own name in,” remarked Ann, “so I think the rest of us should be satisfied.”

CHAPTER XVI

PLANNING A "SHOW"

THE new song became very popular at once. The girls sang it over and over at their work, and shortly everybody, even the box-tenders and the Mud Creek party, whistled or hummed snatches of it at all hours, and it threatened to become rather threadbare.

Flora, as the author, received more praise and applause than poets usually do at the hands of their neighbors and friends. If it made her vain she had too much good taste to show it, and only dimpled silently when any one spoke to her about her talent.

"Write some more songs, Flo, and let's give a concert," said Nina one day.

"What a good idea!" cried Jennie. "I believe Mrs. Johnson would like that better than a shindig."

"I heard her tell the princess they'd got to go to baking pretty soon for the shindig, and she wished the pesky row was over," remarked Nelly.

"Those shindigs are disgraceful," said May, emphatically. "My mother would be ashamed of us if she knew we'd been to one."

"That's what I say," broke in Nina eagerly. "Why not reform them? We can have a perfectly respectable performance and one that everybody, even the roughest ones, will like, if we try."

"Let's have something besides music," suggested Hattie. "Tillie knows a lot of funny pieces to speak and May knows how to get up tableaux."

"You know the old cook book says when it tells you how to cook a rabbit, 'First get your hare,'" quoted Jennie. "Perhaps Mrs. Johnson wouldn't approve of our plan."

"I'm afraid our little doings would seem rather tame to the hop pickers in this region," remarked Rhoda, who was busily picking hops

while this discussion went on round her stand.

“Now, sister, please don’t throw cold water on the plan,” said Kitty. “I think it would be ever so much fun, and I’m sure every body’ll like it as well as their old dance.”

“You go and ask Mrs. Johnson, Jen,” said Nina. “You’re her favorite. She’ll let you do anything.”

“How absurd!” said Jennie, laughing. “But I’m willing to ask her. Not now, though. She’s always cross when she’s getting a meal ready.”

“Well, go to her this evening. But I’m sure she’ll let us have our show, so we might as well be deciding what we’ll have,” said Minnie.

There was a great deal of talking to very little purpose after that, a great many things were proposed and rejected as unsuitable, and nothing had been really decided about the program when Jennie and Flora went to the kitchen after supper to interview their formidable hostess.

They found her with flour up to her elbows, kneading an immense batch of bread. She kept

on with her work, but she smiled and consented at once to the proposals of the girls. She disliked the noise and confusion of the ordinary hop picker's dance, though she would never allow any fighting or intoxication on the floor of her ballroom. Besides, she would go out of her way to thwart the wishes of the Mud Creek-ites, who she knew were counting on the dance, which was to come off on the next Saturday night at her house.

"Where do you want to have your show?" she asked, when the outline of the plan had been unfolded.

"The dining room will be the best place," said Jennie. "We can get John to make a little stage at one end. We can use shawls for curtains. The dining room chairs can be arranged in rows for seats, and so make a nice little hall, don't you see?"

"Yes, I see you've got everything mapped out and Jack Munson roped in," said Mrs. Johnson, smiling. "But if you use the dining room for your show, where'll we have supper?"

“Oh, yes, I’d forgotten all about that,” said Jennie ruefully.

“You bet the pickers from all the yards round won’t forget about supper,” said Mrs. Johnson as she lifted her great, elastic ball of dough to the big pan and punched it vigorously with her red fists.

“Why can’t we pass the supper around on plates?” suggested Flora.

“Massy sakes! That’d never do,” declared Mrs. Johnson. “They’d be sloppin’ coffee and spillin’ victuals on the floor, and like as not have a row before they was through. Ye see, I know hop pickers better’n you do. I suppose I could set the tables out in the yard and make ’em stand up to their supper,” she went on after a pause.

The girls had been feeling rather discouraged by the obstacles Mrs. Johnson had mentioned, but now they saw she was really in favor of their enterprise and meant to help them in carrying it out.

“That would be lovely,” Jennie exclaimed,

as the last suggestion was made. "We could hang lanterns in the trees."

"And there's a bright moon, you know, if the weather is clear," added Flora.

"Well," said Mrs. Johnson quite amiably. "Fix things to suit yourselves and I'll help you all I can."

So it was settled, and the two ambassadors ran off to tell their comrades the good news.

Of course, after that, there was much eager talking and planning. They had only two days in which to prepare for their "Varieties," as they concluded to call the entertainment, and it was necessary to settle on their program that evening.

"Tableaux are so hard to get up," objected some one when they were mentioned.

"Oh, no. You're mistaken," said May eagerly. "They're just as easy as can be. I've helped my mother arrange them dozens of times for church festivals and private theatricals. All we need are some pictures to get ideas of drapery and attitudes and all that."

"We couldn't have anything very gorgeous, May," said Lizzie, "for we haven't the costumes."

"But there's statuary. That's easy," persisted May.

"Why, I should think that would be the hardest of anything," cried Jennie.

"Not if we had some pictures of statues. That's the trouble," said May, rather at a loss.

"Didn't I see some stereopticon views in this room?" asked Jennie, beginning to rummage on the center table. "Yes, here they are! And, oh, good! There are some statues."

May looked over the pile and found a number which would answer her purpose very well. "I can remember how to manage two or three besides," she said. "All we need are plenty of clean sheets, some flour, and a few old boxes. And we can get those things, I'm sure. Mrs. Johnson always gives us our clean sheets on Sunday. She will be willing to have us use them the evening before, and John will get us the boxes for pedestals."

The remainder of the evening was spent in rather confused discussion. But by bed time a suitable program was finally made out, and the party went to sleep with visions of wonderful scenes running through their heads.

CHAPTER XVII

THE JOHNSON "VARIETIES"

THE next day John was enlisted to make the stage and to get such articles as would be needed from the village. Every moment that could be spared, and many that were taken outright from hop picking, were spent in rehearsals, and the good-natured John was kept busy all the evening in going back and forth on errands.

Jennie and Flora had been elected managers, and flew around with tumbled hair and red faces on the last day, and every one was delightfully excited and hurried. Mrs. Johnson advised them to keep the affair a secret during the preparations, as any innovation on the old order of things would be sure to meet with opposition and it would be better, therefore, to

have the audience come and be seated before they knew what was going on.

So after supper the tables were cleared by eager hands and carried to the yard. The chairs were placed in rows with an aisle down the center of the room. Side lamps with tin reflectors were arranged on temporary brackets which John had made for the occasion. The rude stage was covered with an old carpet Mrs. Johnson provided, and the room was entirely transformed and looked quite like a little theater. Jennie and Flora arranged some large shawls as curtains, and tacked a number of gray horse blankets which John brought to them against the rough wall, as a background. And then, to their astonishment and delight, Mrs. Johnson had the piano moved from the parlor and put on the stage. The girls had not dared to ask for this, but knew that it would add immensely to their resources.

Oh, Mrs. Johnson, how splendid you are!" cried Jennie, running up to the little woman and actually putting her arms around her, a pro-

ceeding which rather astonished and embarrassed Mrs. Johnson.

But she looked pleased after all as she said: "Oh, that's all right. You might as well 'go the whole hog' while yer about it."

The company was expected to arrive about seven o'clock, as that was the usual time for dancing to begin. It was not customary to send invitations, but it was understood that all in the neighboring yards who wished to do so were free to come. If the night was pleasant, a hundred guests could be counted on, so that number of seats had been provided, and John was stationed at the door to receive the first arrivals.

Mrs. Johnson had given the Mud Creek girls orders to keep their rooms until they were called, as she "wouldn't have 'em under foot till the time came." At seven o'clock she went to their door and told them they might come down now as it was about time to begin. John was astonished when they appeared, for they had made themselves quite presentable. But

this was not more surprising than their quiet, subdued manners as he led them to their seats near the stage.

Pretty soon a company of pickers and box-tenders came from Powell's yard. They were noisy and boisterous until they reached the door, and then as John led them to their seats, they were struck dumb with surprise and bashfulness. People were now coming in squads of from ten to twenty-five, and John was kept busy in seating the new-comers until every chair was filled, and the late ones had to stand in a crowd at the end of the room.

Mrs. Johnson peeped through a crack in the kitchen door in amazement. The whole company had been seated with no noise or confusion, and were all silently listening in the most absorbed way to the noisy pieces May was playing. When the music stopped one could have heard a pin drop.

Suddenly the lamps were turned out, and the room was left in total darkness except for the glimmer of a little lamp on the piano. Before

any one had time to exclaim, May commenced to play a march and "The Light Brigade" walked up the aisle in single file, keeping step to the music.

In a moment the long hall was brilliantly lighted in the most startling fashion. Rhoda marched at the head of the procession of girls, each one wrapped in a white sheet, with her hair twisted in a tight knot on the top of her head, while in the knot was firmly planted a burning candle. They all carried wands in their right hands made of sticks about two feet long, wound with sprays of hop vines. As they filed in and took positions on the stage, and then went through a drill under Rhoda's directions, the effect was astonishingly brilliant. It quite awed the crowd, who gazed in perfect stillness at the spectacle.

The girls performed some rather intricate figures, winding in and out a good deal, all the time waving their pretty wands, but keeping their heads very erect to prevent grease from spilling from the candles. At a signal from

Rhoda they stopped at last, and then sank on one knee in a circle, Jennie in the middle with a pair of snuffers in her hand. John lighted the side lamp while Jennie went round the kneeling circle and, with a deft snip, put out each light. Flora followed in her wake, collecting the candles which she put in a basket, and the opening number of the program was over.

The curtains were drawn while the sheets were taken off. Rhoda then came to the front of the stage and announced that the next exercise would be a recitation from Miss Tilly Mickells, who stepped forward and with her best bow gave them "The Lost Heir," in a spirited manner. It was a funny little piece which she had heard a traveling elocutionist read in the town hall at home. She had afterward found and committed it to memory, and now recited it with such effect that her audience was much pleased and followed it with hearty applause. Jennie recited a short poem, which was also funny, and the curtains were drawn together.

After a few moments' silence, a general stir commenced in the audience.

"What next?" called some one.

"Bring on yer fiddles and let's have a jig," said a rough box-tender in the back of the room.

"Oh, dry up, Sandy! This is a good enough show," answered another.

"Well, let's have some more, then," said another voice.

By this time there was a loud buzz, and several were rising to leave their seats when Rhoda's face appeared through a crack in the curtain to ask them to remain seated, and to say that the next exercise would soon be ready. In the meantime, Miss Becket would give them some more music.

There was a general settling back into seats as a sign of satisfaction at this announcement, and all became quiet as May commenced to play.

Again the lights in the hall were turned out. The curtains were drawn apart, and the audience gazed upon a really beautiful scene. The little stage had been transformed into a sculp-

tor's studio, filled with lovely forms in snowy marble. The candles which the girls had worn on their heads were arranged in rows back of sheets of tin in such a way as to throw their whole light upon the statues, which could be seen distinctly in every part of the room. No one in the audience imagined that Lizzie, Ada, Nina, Minnie, Kitty, and the little Mortons were the figures standing there so silently.

Of course the variety of statues was very limited, as hair had to be covered with sheets, and the whole figure, with the exception of occasional bare arms and hands, was draped in more or less artistic folds. There were a number of saints in various attitudes, one or two Muses with upturned eyes, and a pretty little flower girl holding out a basket made of white bonnet wire, containing marble roses made of white tissue paper. The square boxes were covered plainly with sheets and added much to the illusion by representing the solid pedestals on which the statues stood or kneeled.

Another great help was a large square of

black mosquito-netting stretched between the audience and the tableaux, softening imperfections and making the statues seem very real.

The audience was spellbound, and no one spoke until the curtains were drawn apart a second time, when Nance Carter said in a hoarse whisper: "What's them, anyhow? Ghosteses?"

Little Hattie giggled and covered her face with her hands at this and Rhoda drew the curtains quickly.

"Oh, Hattie, what made you!" cried Flora, impatiently. "Now you've spoiled everything."

"Well, I couldn't help it, Flo," said her little sister, almost crying. "It's awful hard to kneel here with my head turned up and my eyes closed, and when that girl thought we were ghosts I had to laugh."

The other statues, too, were opening their eyes and relaxing tired muscles, spoiling the carefully arranged folds of drapery and making dark cracks in the marble faces. So the managers concluded to give up showing the

scene again, though there were loud cries from the audience demanding another view.

"It doesn't pay for all the work, does it, Jen," said Flora, with a sigh, as she helped unpin the Greek draperies and wiped flour from the eyes of the statues.

"But didn't the girls look lovely?" said Jennie, enthusiastically. "I never saw anything so beautiful. May is a genius. It's perfectly marvelous to produce such an effect from such materials."

"Yes," said Flora, still sighing. "You know she was brought up in the East, and has had advantages which we haven't had."

"Oh, pooh!" cried Jennie, firing up. "Geography has nothing to do with it. Look at Minnie Waters! She was born and lived in the East till last year. Compare her with Rhoda, who never saw the East."

But there was no further time for heated discussion. The clamor was increasing in the audience, and John went behind the curtain to beg the girls to start the music again. "It's the

only thing that'll keep 'em," said he. "*I can't hold 'em, for some of them chaps from Jones' are bound to have a shindig.*"

So Tilly very good-naturedly seated herself at the piano and played a number of noisy pieces, which had the effect of stilling the audience once more.

Meanwhile the girls were preparing another tableau, and soon the curtains parted, showing a pretty picture which Rhoda announced as "*Star Gazing.*" Lizzie was seated, gracefully draped in shawls to represent a train, and Kitty was kneeling beside her with her eyes raised, following the direction of Lizzie's pointing finger. The faces and attitudes were so pretty that every one liked it, and there was a protest when the curtains were drawn for the last time.

And now came the grand climax. "*The Goddess of Liberty,*" announced Rhoda, after a few minutes' bustle. In the middle of the stage stood a grand figure draped in an American flag. One beautiful white hand and arm was bare, and held a shield which the girls had con-

trived from a pasteboard box covered with paper. A crown of stars rested on her head, and her attitude and expression were reposeful and solemn.

"I swan if that ain't Mirandy Judkins," said Perry, at last recognizing the goddess.

The audience was not more surprised than the girls had been when she accepted their invitation to pose. But poor, lonely Miranda was very glad to be included in the festivities, and much to every one's astonishment, entered very eagerly into the preparations.

But now Rhoda drew the curtains together for the last time. The goddess had stood motionless until she was tired, and the audience was making disrespectful remarks. "Come, girls, get off these duds," she said impatiently, throwing her crown on the floor and twisting up her black hair.

"Oh, Mrs. Judkins!" cried Jennie, warmly. "You don't know how lovely you looked. We are a thousand times obliged to you. That tableau was the very best thing we had."

“Yes, you were so good to help us,” chimed in Flora.

“Well, I ain’t used to such tomfoolery, but you’re welcome to it if it did you any good,” said Miranda. “I’ll tell you what, though,” she went on. “You won’t get rid of them hop pickers with this show. They came here for a dance, and they’ll make a row if they don’t get it. Hear that noise?”

The crowd had risen from their chairs and were talking and laughing boisterously. But by this time Mrs. Johnson and John, with the help of two assistants, had laid the tables in the yard. A number of lanterns were hung in the trees so that the place was brightly lighted, and in a few minutes the company poured out of the house and took their places around the well-spread tables to enjoy one of Mrs. Johnson’s famous suppers.

As soon as the eating began John rushed back to the house, where the girls were seated on the edge of the stage in a tired row. “Mis’ Johnson wants you to light up yer heads agin



In the middle of the stage stood a grand figure draped in the American flag.

when they are through supper and take a turn down in the hop yards," he said. "It's the only thing to git the crowds home."

"Oh, but, John, we're so tired!" protested Flora.

"I know it," said John, "but I allow you'd rather git shet of 'em than have 'em howling round till midnight."

Jennie had commenced to stick the candles in the top knots, and Rhoda said cheerfully:

"Why, yes, of course we'll go to please Mrs. Johnson."

" 'Twon't take long," added Myra.

After a little discussion they all consented, and went first to their rooms for waterproofs and overshoes. When they appeared again they were singing the hop picker's song, keeping step to the music. They marched to the hop yard where they moved in and out among the vines, the lights on their heads shining like glow-worms against a background of leaves.

The whole company immediately started for the hop yard, as Mrs. Johnson supposed they

would. She had the tables quickly cleared and returned to their places in the dining room, and by the time the company had trooped back, following "The Light Brigade" to the house, the dining room door was closed and locked. The lamps were put out. "The Light Brigade" marched to its quarters, the Mud Creek girls went to their rooms, and the guests were left out of doors.

"I swanny, if that ain't downright mean!" said some one indignantly.

"Oh, come on, boys!" called another. "It's ten o'clock and time to quit, anyway. They've given us a good show and a boss supper. That's enough for one night. We can git dancin' enough next week over to Haverman's."

That speech decided the crowd to be good-natured instead of quarrelsome, so they moved off, singing the hop picker's song, and in two minutes the place was as quiet as possible, much to the relief of Mrs. Johnson, who stood at a darkened window in the dining room, fully expecting to have a struggle with an unruly mob.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DAY AFTER THE SHOW

THE next morning the girls felt rather tired and not much like work, so there was more talking than picking around most of the boxes of the Minnichutes. Talking things over seemed to be as enjoyable as the acting had been the night before at their successful "show."

"How perfectly splendid that statuary was! I never saw any thing so lovely," cried Myra. "May is a genius."

"Oh, no," said May, smiling. "Those statues were not original with me. They're very easy. I think the 'Light Brigade' was the best thing we had and Rhoda really invented that, you know."

"Oh, yes, of course, Rhoda's got more gump-tion than all the rest of us put together," cried Tilly in her wholesale way.

“I think the tableau with the Princess was as good as anything,” said Nina.

“Yes, didn’t she look grand!” echoed Tilly.

“And then how good she was to us,” added Nora. “I never was more surprised in my life than when she came and helped us so much. She’s quite changed since we came, hasn’t she?”

“I believe she’s very unhappy,” remarked Myra.

“I know she is,” said Jennie. “John told me all about her this morning.”

“Oh, tell us, too,” cried the girls, clustering round Jennie.

The beauty and sadness of the princess had made her an interesting figure to them, and they had speculated from time to time about the mystery which they fancied clung round her. Flora had declared more than once that she believed there was some romance in her life.

“Do hurry and tell us all about it, Jen,” cried Tilly.

But just then the boss came up to the group, which had been chatting almost an hour, to the utter neglect of their work. His manner had changed entirely since the accident at the swimming pool, and he was now very respectful as he turned to Rhoda, who had been steadily picking during the discussion.

"I'm afraid, miss, I'll have to ask your crowd to go to work this morning," he remarked almost apologetically, "Johnson's afraid of frost, and that 'ud spile the hops. He wants as many picked to-day as possible."

"Why, yes, of course," cried Jennie. "What slothful servants we are. What are we thinking about! Girls, off to business! I'll tell you the story to-night."

They ran to their places and began work in earnest, so that by supper time most of them had accomplished their usual tasks. They were tired and sleepy at bedtime, but had not forgotten about the promised story and after the little girls were sleeping, the older ones gathered round Jennie, as they took out hair pins

and brushed and braided their hair while they listened.

“Well, in the first place,” began Jennie, “the princess is ‘a grass widow’ and not a real one.”

“A grass widow!” echoed May, “I never heard of such a thing. “What does it mean?”

“Why, a woman who doesn’t live with her husband, of course,” answered Tilly impatiently.

“Go on, Jennie.”

“Is she divorced?” asked Nelly.

“No,” replied Jennie. “But if I’m going to tell you about her you must keep still and not ask any more questions till I get through, or I’ll never finish.” The girls settled down into expectant attitudes and Jennie went on: “John says he knows the princess’ husband very well. His name is Alfred Judkins, and he’s the clerk at the village store.”

“He must be that meachin’ little fellow who never will look us in the face when he waits on us!” broke in Tilly.

Jennie shook her finger at Tilly warningly, Nora placed her hand over the offending mouth, and the story proceeded.

“He is a mild little man several inches shorter than his wife. It seems she was never popular among young men, although she is so handsome, and no one wanted to marry her, because she had such a dreadful temper. They began to call her an old maid when she was twenty-five, when at last, she met Alfred at a party where they fell in love with each other at first sight. They were engaged at once and were soon married, although the families on both sides objected to the match. After that, John said she led the poor little man a ‘dog’s life.’ He was completely under her thumb, and did not dare say his soul was his own. She got tired of his tameness, John thinks. She was used to quarreling and liked the excitement of it, and so as it takes two to make a quarrel, she couldn’t get what she wanted. One day she flew into a rage about nothing when they had been married a year, and left him, telling him not to come near

her till she sent for him. Mrs. Johnson needed her through the hop picking season, so she came here to live."

"Oh, pooh!" said Nelly in a tone of disgust, "I don't see any romance in that story. She is horrid and he is weak. They're not a bit interesting."

"Oh, but wait till I tell you the rest!" exclaimed Jennie, waving her hair brush for silence. "John says the curious thing about the affair is that they are as much in love with each other as ever, and are pining away because they are separated. He has a nice horse and drives out here nights, hiding his horse among the trees, just to look at the house where she lives, and perhaps get a glimpse of her. John has caught him several times peeping through the bushes and gazing up at her window. She does not know he is there, but sits where he can see her, and looks forlornly down the road as though she was expecting somebody. You know how often we have seen her there. She's always the picture of misery."

“Just like Romeo and Juliet!” exclaimed Flora.

“Perhaps her unhappiness is what has made her so cross to us,” commented Lizzie.

“I would think their friends would let her know how he comes to look at her, and by this time would have reconciled them,” remarked Ada.

“Mrs. Johnson doesn’t want her to go back to her husband till the hop picking is over, and Alfred’s friends think he is better off without his tempery wife. He thinks they will never come together unless somebody helps them, for the husband is far too timid and meek for the first step. He thinks he must take her at her word, and be banished until she sends for him, and she is too proud to call him to her after leaving him as she did, and so they continue to be miserable apart.”

“Why, it’s just like a novel being lived before us,” cried Nina.

“And why can’t we do something to bring them together and make the story end right,

‘And they lived happily ever after,’ ” exclaimed Tilly.

“What would you do?” asked Rhoda who, as usual, had listened silently to the discussion.

“Why, go and tell ’em how silly they are and drag ’em together,” cried Tilly, emphatically.

The girls laughed at this plan for reconciliation and Jennie said: “I’m afraid you’d make matters worse than ever, Tilly, but I like your idea, and I believe Flora would think of some way we could make the story end happily.” They all turned to Flora who sat on her bed by Jennie’s side. Her cheeks were pinker than usual and her eyes were shining as she said with an eager smile: “I’ve thought of something already that we might do.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER

“**O**UT with it, Flo! Don’t be stingy with your little ideas,” said Tilly.

“Not to-night,” said Flora, rising and beginning to undress. “I’ll have to think it out a little more, and I can always think best in bed.” The girls objected to waiting, and begged her to give them an inkling at least, of what she had in mind. But Rhoda sided with her, and as it was late, and they were tired and sleepy, they gave up teasing, the lights were soon out, and everybody soundly sleeping.

It was not till bedtime of the next day that Flora had opportunity to tell her plans. They were all in their rooms, the little girls asleep, when the older ones gathered round Flora to hear her “scheme.”

She plunged into it at once. “We must de-

ceive them both," she began, "there is no other way to do it, but to write to Mr. Judkins an anonymous letter."

"Oh, Rhoda doesn't approve of anonymous letters," said Jennie at once. "She won't let us do that."

"You forget that I have no right to dictate to Flora," said Rhoda, smiling. "But I don't think she believes anonymous letters are honorable any more than we do. She must have a good reason for this one, and I'd like to hear what it is."

"Yes, tell us quick, Flo. You've got it all written out, haven't you," said the irrepressible Tilly.

The young girl drew a bit of paper from her pocket, saying, "I don't know any other way to manage it, Rhoda. And I don't believe this can do any harm."

"Let's hear it," called several voices, and Flora began reading:

“MR. ALFRED JUDKINS.

“*Sir*: Your wife is very unhappy because she is away from you. She would like to have you come to see her. Please write and ask her to ride with you to-morrow evening. Tell her to be ready at the gate at eight o’clock. If she is there you will know that what I have written is true. Do not tell her of this letter. It would make her angry.

“From a Friend.”

“What possible harm could come from that letter, even if it is anonymous?” asked Jennie.

“None whatever, I’m sure,” said Rhoda heartily. “As Flora says, it seems to be the only thing you can do, if you are going to try to bring them together. It’s a very clever letter. I don’t think it could be improved. There is neither too much or too little in it. If the Princess really wants to go back to her husband she will be glad of this opportunity, and if she doesn’t. why, things will be just as they are now.”

Flora looked very much pleased and relieved. She valued praise from Rhoda very much, and

Jennie exclaimed, "There! Didn't I tell you Flora could do it?"

"But how will you manage to get the letter to the office and have an answer from the princess this evening?" asked the practical Tilly.

"John is going to the village this evening and will take the letter," and Jennie. "Mr. Judkins will probably answer at once, so that his wife will have the reply in the afternoon mail. You know it gets here at three o'clock."

"You don't mean that you've been talking to John about our plan!" cried Jennie. "You know he doesn't approve of bringing them together. He'll spoil everything!"

"No, he won't! I talked him over to our side," said Flora quickly. "He's going to help us."

"Of course! I could have told you Flora would do that," said Nelly, laughing.

"Well, it's all right if he really will help us," said Jennie.

"He's waiting for it now, isn't he?" asked the astute Tilly slyly.

“Yes,” answered Flora, rising. “If you all agree to send it I’ll take it out to him.

“Of course we do,” said Myra. “It’s going to be awfully romantic. I don’t believe I can wait till to-morrow evening.”

“We must be careful not to show that we know what is going on,” cautioned Jennie, when Flora had gone with the letter.

“Don’t tell the little girls,” added Tilly. “They’d be sure to ‘let the cat out of the bag.’ ”

The next morning John told the girls he had seen Alf Judkins reading his letter soon after it had been put in the post-office.

“Oh, do tell us how he looked,” cried Nina.

“Like a kitten that had licked the cream pot,” said John, grinning. “Poor fool! He don’t know when he’s well off.”

“Now, John, don’t you spoil our fun,” warned Jennie. “Mrs. Judkins must never know what we’ve done. You won’t tell, will you?”

“Don’t you worry! I’m mum. I’m just as ashamed of it as you are,” said John, shoulder-

ing an immense sack of hops, and then adding: "I don't suppose it will do 'em any harm to try it again. Perhaps Mirandy has learned a little sense."

Flora and Jennie went to the house about three o'clock to get the mail for their party, as it was usually brought in at this time. In a few minutes they came running back with a bunch of letters which they soon distributed among the waiting girls around Rhoda's box.

"Did the princess get her letter?" asked Tilly in an excited voice.

"Yes," replied Jennie in the same tone.

"Don't talk so loud. The little girls will hear you," cautioned Flora. "You know how suspicious they are about our 'secrets.' "

"Yes! yes! but go on," said Myra ungently.

"Well," continued Jennie in a lower tone, "when we got there the princess was looking tired and cross as usual, and as though she didn't take any interest in anything. Then Mrs. Johnson called out, 'Here's a letter for

you, Mirandy.' The princess took it and her face got as red as could be when she looked at it. Then she put it in her pocket and left the room as fast as she could go."

"Of course it's from him!" cried Tilly. "And the next chapter will be the elopement!"

"How absurd!" said Minnie. "A man can't elope with his wife!"

"Yes, he can, in this case," said Flora. "John says Alf is so afraid of Mrs. Johnson he dares not come near the place, and if he meets Miranda they will have to run away together."

"But you know they are only going to take drives in the evenings," said Myra.

"Perhaps they won't come back," suggested Ada.

"She wouldn't be so dishonorable as that, I'm sure," said Jennie confidently. "How could Mrs. Johnson get along without her? You know it's almost impossible to get help for housework up here during the hop picking and Miranda promised to stay all the season."

“Hush!” warned Flora. “The little girls are coming!”

Five or six of them, led by Kitty and Jessie, now reached the larger group, and Kittie said in an aggrieved tone, “We think it’s mean for you girls to have secrets from us.”

“What makes you think we have any?” asked Jennie, trying to look innocent.

“Oh, you know you have!” replied the little girl, shaking her finger accusingly at her sister. “You’ve been whispering together for a long time, and we don’t think it’s fair.”

“Well then, why don’t you have secrets of your own,” said Jennie.

“We have got one!” cried the little girl who had a sharp nose and bright eyes.

Kitty turned to the child inquiringly when she whispered: “Don’t you remember about Huldy and the letter?”

Jennie had very quick hearing. Her father said she should be a woodsman, she had such “sharp ears,” so, though the others did not

hear the whisper, Jennie caught the words, "Huldy" and "letter," and instantly her suspicion was roused that something was going on concerning their plot which they ought to know. The little girls scampered off to their places, giggling and jeering and shouting taunting words to the big girls. "We don't want any of your old secrets! We've got one of our own!"

"I must find out what it is," said Jennie. "I believe it's about our letter."

"You'll have to be very diplomatic, or you won't get it out of them," said Flora.

"Yes, I know. But I guess I can manage Kitty some way. She never can keep a secret very long."

The opportunity came very soon. Kitty ran to her sister, crying from the pain caused by a sliver of wood in her little pink finger. Jennie put her arm round the child and led her to the house where they could get a sharp needle to extract the sliver. In a few minutes the sur-

gical operation was performed, the pain was gone, and the two sisters sat on the edge of the bed chatting.

“Do you like it here, dear?” asked Jennie, trying to lead naturally to the subject she wanted to discuss.

“Yes, of course. It’s splendid. I’m so sorry we have to go home next week. I’m afraid we’ll never see John again.”

The little girl spoke mournfully, and Jennie hastened to say, “Oh, yes, I’m sure we’ll come back next year, and I think John will be here too. But I expect Mrs. Johnson and the princess and Huldy will be glad to have us go, they have to work so hard. I’m glad Huldy had a letter. She seems to have so few pleasures.”

“That wasn’t her letter,” said Kitty quickly. “She was just carrying one to the village for the princess.” And then realizing that she had given away the precious secret she cried angrily, “There now! You’ve made me tell. The girls will be awful mad at me!”

“Oh, that’s not much of a secret,” said Jen-

nie, laughing. "Just carrying a letter to the office to mail."

"She wasn't going to mail it," declared Kitty. "She was just going to give it to some one in the village."

"How did you find all this out?" asked Jennie.

"Why, I was walking to the house with some of the girls for a drink, and we met Huldry on her way to the village. She said Miranda was going to do her work and give her a penny besides, for taking the letter."

"Did you see the name on the envelope?"

"Yes, she showed it to us. But I'm not going to tell you that. I've got to keep part of the secret, anyway," said the little girl, wagging her head sagely.

Jennie rose and going to her satchel she opened it and took out a pasteboard box and showed Kitty a small carnelian ornament shaped like a heart, which was lying inside on a bit of cotton. "Do you want that, dear?" she asked.

“Oh, sister!” cried the child eagerly. “You wouldn’t really give me that, would you?”

“I will if you’ll give me the first name on the letter. You needn’t say the last one, you know, and then you can tell the girls you haven’t told all the secret.”

“Oh, yes,” cried Kitty, delighted to have found a way to be loyal to her comrades, and earn a bribe at the same time. “The first name was Alfred. But you mustn’t ask for the last one, for I really must keep part of the secret, you know.”

“No, I won’t ask you any more,” said Jennie, handing over the coveted trinket. “Now we must go back to our work.”

There was a good deal of speculation among the large girls when Jennie told them what she had learned. This was an unexpected turn of events. What did the princess mean by sending a letter so promptly to her husband? There were various guesses.

“Perhaps she was angry with him for presuming to write to her. Or she might be plan-

ning to leave Mrs. Johnson, as Tilly had suggested.

“But we never dreamed of such a thing,” declared Jennie. “We thought she would just be friends with her husband and ride with him evenings and then go back home when the season was over.”

“I don’t see how she could have the conscience to leave her aunt,” said Myra. “John says Mrs. Johnson was awful good to her. Her own folks wouldn’t have her when she left her husband. She was sick, and Mrs. Johnson took her in and nursed her. The least she can do in return is to stay till the season is over as she promised. It lasts only a week longer.”

“Well, we’ll see,” said Rhoda comfortably. “You had the best intentions in the world when you played ‘Providence,’ and perhaps things will turn out as you wish, after all.”

CHAPTER XX

THE ELOPEMENT

IN the evening, about dark, Jennie started with eight or ten girls to walk to the village with the intention of doing some shopping and returning as soon as possible. The little girls, by special permission, had gone with John to the drying house to see the operation of baling hops, and Rhoda, May and Ann went out for a stroll in the soft September twilight. They had entered the woods back of the house, hoping to hear the song of the whippoorwill, which often serenaded them, and were seated silently on a log listening, when May whispered:

“Hark! What bird is that! I never heard that note before!”

“It must be peculiar to this region,” said Rhoda. “How strange it is! We must ask John about it.”

Just then they heard a window open cautiously above the porch. They were in the shadow of the woods and could not be seen, although they could see the house perfectly. Presently a woman appeared at the open window, apparently to listen, for she stood until the bird note was repeated.

“That’s the princess,” whispered May, “and her husband is signaling for her. She’ll be going out to meet him now in a moment. His horse and carriage are probably out of sight somewhere.”

“How surprised Jennie will be, she was so sure he would not come till to-morrow night,” said Ann.

“Yes, the princess evidently couldn’t wait, and sent him a letter by Huldý telling him to come to-night,” said Rhoda.

“Shan’t we go?” suggested May. “It seems almost like spying to sit here and watch them.”

“It might embarrass them if they knew we were here. Perhaps we’d better stay till they go,” whispered Rhoda.

While she was speaking, a man's form began to creep cautiously around the corner of the house. He carried a short ladder in his hand, which he planted against the porch and then repeated the bird note softly. The woman appeared again, this time with her hat on. There was a light in the room and the girls could see the outlines of Miranda's form as she carefully lifted a small trunk from the floor and placed it outside on the roof of the porch.

"She's going to run away, just as Tilly predicted," said May, clasping her hands. "Isn't it too bad! What will poor Jennie say! She feels so responsible about the affair."

"It's too late to do anything, and I doubt if anything could be done now. We'll have to take the consequences of meddling in other people's affairs," said Rhoda.

Miranda blew out the light and followed the trunk carefully, closing the window behind her. They could see her form dimly after this as she handed the trunk, and then a satchel, to the man who was now halfway up the ladder. In



She handed the trunk, and then a satchel, to the man who was now half way up the ladder.

a moment more the two forms were on the ground, bearing the trunk between them while the man carried the satchel in his left hand. They disappeared in the woods in a moment more, and May exclaimed: "There! we've seen the elopement! I don't see why she couldn't have gone from the front door. It seems absurd for her to sneak off that way with her own husband."

"She probably was ashamed to face Mrs. Johnson," said Rhoda, "or perhaps the husband was afraid of her."

"It's likely she wanted to do something romantic," added Ann.

They were in their room now and just then the little girls came in, and nothing more was said at the time. Jennie and her companions returned a half hour later, rather subdued and silent, and found the smaller girls asleep, and Rhoda, May and Ann in bed.

"What a shame!" cried Jennie when she found what had happened. "Don't you think we ought to go and tell Mrs. Johnson, sister?"

“No,” said Rhoda, “it would do no good to disturb her to-night. We’d better wait to see what happens in the morning. She may be here then, after all.”

“No,” said Tilly confidently. “She’s gone for good, or why did she take her things?”

“I call it disgusting!” cried Nora, pulling at a knot in her shoe lace. “There’s no use in trying to help anybody; you always get into trouble by it.”

“Well! It’s a good joke on us,” said Tilly, laughing.

“I wonder what Mrs. Johnson will say in the morning,” remarked Nora.

“Won’t she be mad! And who will wait on the tables?” added Fanny. “She’ll have to get somebody else,” said Flora.

“But that’s not so easy! They say it’s almost impossible to get any one to do house-work here. Every one wants to pick hops and nobody will wash dishes,” said Minnie.

“It’s not very honorable for the princess to go off and leave her aunt when she promised to

stay through the season," remarked Lizzie.

"John says her own folks wouldn't have her when she left her husband," said Nina. "She was sick, too, and Mrs. Johnson took her in and nursed her and was kind to her till she got well."

"How ungrateful!" cried Lizzie. "The least she could do in return for such kindness would be to stay to help as she promised, and then go home to her husband afterward."

"But I say we're to blame too," broke in Jennie. "She never would have thought of going off that way if we hadn't put her up to it."

"Well then," said Tilly promptly, "we must make it up to Mrs. Johnson by doing the princess' work. We can at least wash the dishes and set the tables and sweep the floors."

The girls laughed, and some of them said they had no time for such work, but Rhoda's gentle voice called out, "Go to sleep now, dears. We'll see to-morrow what we can do."

They felt rather guilty and apprehensive in

the morning when they entered the dining room for breakfast. The prospect was rather unpromising. The tables were not laid and there was no princess to pass coffee or griddle cakes. While they stood in a group undecided what to do, the "Low Downs" came in and looked around in wonder. In a moment the kitchen door opened and Mrs. Johnson came in with a red and angry face. She carried two large coffee pots to a side table and set them down on it, remarking briefly as she went back to the kitchen, "You'll have to wait on yourselves this morning. Mirandy's cleared out." There were piles of plates and knives and forks on the side table, and the girls began at once to place them on the long dining tables, two or three of the Mud Creek girls stepping forward timidly to help. Rhoda and Ann poured coffee, which the little girls distributed. Perry and Simmons brought fresh water from the pump in large tin pails, while John cut up some huge loaves of bread which Mr. Johnson brought to him in a basket.

They were all very jolly about it, and there was a good deal of chatter and laughing as they ran to and fro, and Kitty said:

“Why, this is fun. Just like a picnic.”

“I’m glad the princess is gone. She was always so cross,” said Hattie.

“You’d better not say that to Mrs. Johnson,” cautioned Nora.

“No, of course not. But don’t she look mad!” said the little girl in a whisper. Mrs. Johnson had prepared great platters of fried ham and bacon with eggs which were now placed on the tables by the box-tenders. Mr. Johnson brought in some huge dishes full of baked potatoes just from the oven, and the meal was ready. John went to the kitchen to help Mrs. Johnson bake the griddle cakes and presently began to pass them around, his broad face shining with good nature and perspiration.

As soon as the small girls had finished their breakfasts they made him sit down to eat while they waited on him, while Rhoda, Ann and Myra began to pick up the soiled dishes. Jennie

found two big dishpans hanging on nails by the kitchen door which she brought into the dining room. Simmons carried pails of hot water to them from the kitchen, and Huldý ran out to the back yard to get some wiping towels which were hanging on the line there.

“Many hands make light work.” It was not long before the dishes were clean and placed on the tables and the girls were ready for the hop yard.

Before they left Mrs. Johnson came into the dining room with a good deal of the grimness gone from her face as she said to Rhoda: “Well, I’m much obliged to you for helpin’ me out. I didn’t know how I was goin’ to git along.”

“Where’s Mirandy, Mis’ Johnson?” asked Simmons. “Has she took sick?”

“No. She’s took with foolishness. She’s run off with Alf Judkins. Just wait till I see her! I’ll give her a piece of my mind. I’ll tell what I think of her to treat me like this after all I’ve done for her.”

“What makes you think she’s gone off with Alf?” asked Perry.

“Johnson saw him hangin’ round the woods last night and when I went to her room to call her this mornin’ I found she’d taken all her things.”

“That’s too bad,” said the box-tender sympathizingly.

“It’s just like her,” went on Mrs. Johnson in a hard tone. “She never did have no conscience nor heart.”

“Can’t ye git somebody to take her place?” queried Perry.

Mrs. Johnson shrugged her shoulders. “I guess you know as well as I, ye can’t git help for love or money now,” she said as she walked back to the kitchen.

The girls went to their work in rather a sober mood. Their scheme to restore the sad princess to home and happiness did not look so fair and praiseworthy as it had at first. It began to seem to some of them that they had meddled in affairs that did not concern them and had

brought about more trouble than good. But the mischief was done. Rhoda thought nothing would be gained for any one by telling Mrs. Johnson the part they had played in the little drama, and that they could best repair the harm they had done by helping their hostess with her work as much as possible, and Jennie and all the rest concluded to abide by this decision.

The day after the princess left the girls washed the dishes, set the tables and divided their party into relays to act as waitresses when the meals were served. Many of the Mud Creek girls were always anxious to help and the little girls begged for the privilege of waiting on the tables. There was more fun than penance in these tasks, although it gave them no time for rest, and they went to bed more tired than usual that night.

“My copy book says ‘virtue is its own reward,’ ” said Tilly, “but it seems to be its own punishment in this case.”

“Well, it won’t last long,” said Rhoda.

“We shall be going home in a week and Mrs. Johnson’s troubles will be over.”

“Only a week!” echoed several voices.

“I never knew time to slip away so fast,” remarked Myra. “I wish we could stay longer!”

“Yes, haven’t we had a good time,” cried Tilly heartily.

“I’ve got some news!” said Jennie, coming up to the box where the girls had been talking.

“John says Mr. Johnson has gone to get a woman they have heard of to help Mrs. Johnson.”

“I wonder if she will be there to wait on the table for dinner to-day,” said Tilly.

“I hope so,” said Fanny. “It’s awful hard to wait while you are hungry and see other people eat, and the little girls do slop things so dreadfully.”

They were all as hungry as usual at noon and some of them expected to be much hungrier before they could eat. But a great surprise awaited them when they went into the dining room for dinner. They found the tall princess

there, calmly placing the hot potatoes and the roast meat on the tables. She smiled when the girls spoke to her, but otherwise acted as though nothing had happened. They dared not say anything to her about her return, but they felt sure John could tell them all about it, and went in search of him as soon as they left the table. He laughed when they began to question him.

“You’d better ask Mr. Johnson how he did it,” he said; “I don’t know. I reckon he let on to the missus that he knew of some other woman, but he meant all the time to coax Mirandy to come back. He’s the only one that can do anything with her. She thinks a heap of him.”

“I wish I could have been there when she came back. There must have been an awful row,” said Fanny.

“No, there wasn’t no row,” said John. “I was just carryin’ some meat from the icehouse to the kitchen when Mirandy came.”

“Oh, I knew you could tell us all about it,” cried Tilly. “Go on! Go on!”

John grinned and went on. "The missus she swelled up and got red in the face, and I thought she was a-goin' to pitch into Mirandy, but she didn't. She just looked like she hadn't got no words to tell her what she thought of her, and Mirandy never said nothin' either. She just looked kinder ashamed, and then poor old Johnson put in with his little dribblin' voice:

" 'Ma,' says he, 'I told Mirandy if she'd come and help us out till we git through I'd go to the village to git her in the mornin's and Alf says he'll come after her nights.' And then he lit out and so did I. I don't know what the two wimmen said or did when they was left alone, but I reckon it's all right. She's gone to work anyway."

"Hooray!" shouted Jennie, waving her sun-bonnet by the string. " 'All's well that ends well.' We've made the story end happily anyway."

CHAPTER XXI

BREAKING UP

THE hop picking season was over. The two big wagons which had brought the Minnichute and Atwood girls from the railroad station were again at the door of the Johnsons', waiting to take them away. They were no longer dressed as hop pickers. Most of them had given their soiled aprons, gloves and sun-bonnets to Huldy's mother, who said she would be glad to make them over for her large family.

So the girls looked only like neatly dressed travelers, as they took their seats at the breakfast table to eat by lamplight, as usual, and be waited on by the princess. "I can't realize that we're actually going home," said Jennie. "I feel as though I'd been a hop picker all my life."

“Should you like to pick hops always?” asked Jessie.

“We’ve all enjoyed it. But I suppose we’d get tired of too much of anything,” replied Jennie judicially.

“There’s a lot o’ folks round here that would be glad to have you come back next year,” remarked the princess, who had overheard the conversation.

“That’s nice,” said Rhoda. “We’d like to come again, I’m sure.”

“Our box-tenders and the Mud Creekites wanted you to give another show,” said Miranda, balancing a tray of coffee cups on one hand. “But they hadn’t sand enough to ask you to do it.”

“Did they *really* like it?” cried Tilly eagerly. “No one except John said anything about it, and we thought perhaps it was a failure.”

“Country folks is tongue-tied. You’d ought to know that by this time,” said Miranda. “The hop pickers round here haven’t talked of nothin’ else since the show.”

“There! You see it did pay after all, Flo,” said Jennie.

“What did they like best, Mrs. Judkins?” asked Kitty.

Miranda was busy passing hot griddle-cakes, but she stopped with her hand on her hip to answer, “They liked the hull of it, but some thought one thing was best and some another. But they all talked the most about the last thing you did—marching down in the hop yard.”

“Did they all see that?” asked Lizzie.

“I should say they did! Every last one of ’em. Little Matey Mallony stood up here by the house with me, but she could see your white sheets and the lights on your heads moving among the vines. You were so far away you looked like little people, and we could just hear your singing faintly. It sounded most like bees, or something humming. I thought Matey would have a fit. She got so excited she laughed and cried all together. She said she knew you had turned into fairies like the ones her grandmother used to see in Ireland.”

“Dear little Matey!” said Rhoda, smiling. “What an imagination she must have. I hope we shall see her, and the other girls to say good-by to them.”

“I’m afraid you can’t,” said Miranda, her hand on the door. “I saw ’em a few minutes ago goin’ down the road. Perhaps they went to the village to do a little tradin’ before they go home this afternoon.”

“Where’s John?” asked Jessie anxiously, a little later, when they were about to start. “We can’t go till we’ve said good-by to him.”

“Oh, ye can’t get shet o’ me,” said John, coming up to the wagon with a whip in his hand and his coat over his arm. “I’m goin’ along to keep ye out o’ mischief. See that whip?”

The little girls crowded around him with delighted cries when they found he was to be their driver, and Jennie, in the other wagon, remarked to Flora: “What a nice fellow John is! It’s a pity he’s had no education, isn’t it?”

“He’s had no chance,” said Flora. “He’s

worked winters in a lumber camp, and summers on farms, since he was a little boy. But he's going to Chicago next winter to work at something, and intends to attend night school."

"Shall we see him there if we are in the city?" asked Jennie.

"Perhaps," said Flora, smiling.

Mrs. Johnson came out of the house then with a large, well-filled basket in her hand. She handed it to her husband, saying: "Here's a lunch for the girls. I guess they'll be hungry enough to eat it before you get to Maddock. Be sure and give 'em a good dinner at the station."

He nodded assent, and meekly gazed at his horses' ears while the crowd of noisy girls finally adjusted themselves in the long seats and told him they were ready.

Their hostess shook hands all round, walking up each side of the long wagons. The girls leaned toward her, all talking together as they thanked her for her kindness to them, and she

answered cordially, telling them she expected them all to come back to them next year.

Huldy stood by the door to see them off, her little, red arms wrapped in a bit of hop sacking which served for an apron, and Miranda waved her handkerchief from an upper window. Jennie said afterwards she was sure her eyelids were red.

“Hurrah for O. Johnson! Three cheers for his wife!” sang the merry party as they drove away at last.

The daylight had come on now, so that they could see about them very well, and they saluted with cheers the various familiar objects as they passed them. The hop house, the kilns, the barns, and the dismantled hop yard. They had been there but five weeks, but the time had been so crowded with novel experiences it seemed much longer, and they were leaving the place with genuine regret. They had all gained wonderfully in health and strength. Even Ada Fay seemed like another person and was be-

ginning to take part in the life around her with real zest.

They left the farm by way of a long lane with a rail fence at each side, at the end of which there was a gate through which they must pass. When the wagons stopped for this to be opened, a group of people who had been hiding in the fence corners seemed to spring suddenly from the ground and surround the travelers.

“Why, it’s the Mud Creek girls!” cried Myra, when the first surprise was over.

“And there’s little Matey!” exclaimed Rhoda, catching a glimpse of the child in the crowd.

It was plain to be seen that they were there for a farewell greeting, though they were all too bashful to speak. But they giggled, and reached up to shake cordially the outstretched hands of the girls in the wagons.

“Here, Matey, where be ye?” called Nance Carter.

The child came forward with a heaping basket of grapes. The larger girls helped her

mount the forward wagon, where she quickly placed the basket in Rhoda's lap and slipped like a drop of quicksilver through the arms of the girls who tried to detain her, and before any one could say a word, had vanished behind a group of her friends.

John had opened the gate by this time, and was ready to drive away.

But another surprise was waiting for them. Several of the Powell pickers were also hiding in fence corners on the other side of the gate, and came forward laughing bashfully as John led the horses through the open gateway. Molly Calligan led the party as she stepped up to the side of the wagon and handed Rhoda and Jennie each a small package, saying in a low voice: "Me mother sent these to ye's to show we hain't forgot what ye done fur me sister."

The girls opened the parcels, and found two beautiful collars of old Irish lace.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Jennie. "But really they must be very valuable," she continued,

as she examined the thin, delicate fabric, which seemed almost as frail as a spider's web. "They look like heirlooms."

"Me great-grandmother made 'em in Ireland," said Molly. "They came to me mother when me grandmother died."

"Oh, you mustn't give them away!" exclaimed Jennie, looking very much distressed. "We couldn't think of taking such precious things away from your family."

Molly's face fell, and she said: "I'm sorry, miss. And me mother will feel awful bad if ye won't take 'em. She said there wasn't nothin' too good fur ye, and she'd be happy all her days for thinkin' she'd giv ye the best she had fur—"

"Of course we'll take them!" broke in Rhoda. "It is very kind and generous of your mother to give us such beautiful things to remember you by. Please thank her for us."

Molly's face beamed joyfully. The girls of both parties shook hands again with most friendly good-bys, when Tilly called out, "Let's

all sing the Hop Picker's Song." May started the tune, the Powell and Mud Creek girls joined the chorus with loud voices more or less musical, and the travelers left them standing there, the faint notes of "Vive la Compagnie" still in the air, after the two groups were lost to each other's sight.

THE END

